

Older Americans Month 2007

HISTORY

- May was designated Older Americans Month in 1963 shortly after President John F. Kennedy met with the National Council of Senior Citizens to discuss growing concerns about the third of Americans age 65 or older then living in poverty. Subsequently, every President has issued an annual proclamation focusing the attention of communities across the country on the needs and contributions of older Americans.
- The theme for Older Americans Month 2007 is “Older Americans: Making Choices for a Healthier Future.” This theme encourages us to think differently about health and long term care, and work together to rebalance and modernize our current systems so that we may adequately plan for and address the needs of current and future generations.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF OLDER AMERICANS

- The older population--persons 65 years or older--numbered 36.8 million in 2005. This age group accounted for 12 percent of the total population. Between 2004 and 2005, this age group increased by 457,000 people.
- Projections suggest that by 2050 this nation will have 86.7 million older residents, 21% of the population.
- There is a projected 147% increase in the 65-and-over population between 2000 and 2050. By comparison, the population as a whole would have increased by only 49 percent over the same period.
- The increase in those 85 or over has grown even more rapidly. In 1900 only 100,000 (or two tenths of a percent) of the population was in this age group. During the 1990s, the 85 and over age group grew faster than any other group in the older population, increasing 38% from 3.1 million to 4.2 in 2000, reaching 5.1 million in 2005.
- The proportion of older persons in the population varies considerably by state with some states experiencing much greater growth in their older populations (Figures 4 and 5). In 2005, about half (51.6%) of persons 65+ lived in nine states. California had 3.9 million; Florida 3.0 million; New York 2.5 million; Texas 2.3 million; and Pennsylvania 1.9 million, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, and New Jersey each had well over 1 million.
- The projected percentage of Florida's population age 65 and older in 2015 is 20%, which would lead all states. In that year, Florida will have nearly as many residents 65 and older as younger than 18.
- Minority populations are projected to increase from 5.7 million in 2000 (16.4% of the elderly population) to 8.1 million in 2010 (20.1% of the elderly) and then to 12.9 million in 2020 (23.6% of the elderly). Between 2004 and 2030, the white population 65+ is projected to increase by 74% compared with 183% for older minorities, including Hispanics (254%), African-Americans (147%), American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts (143%), and Asians and Pacific Islanders (208%).
- 54% of people 65 and older were married with spouse present in 2005. 30% of people 65 and older were widowed in 2005

- From 1950 to 2003 the educational attainment of older Americans moved upward every decade. By 2005, 72% of those 65 and over had received a high school diploma or higher, a figure that in 1950 was less than 20%. The proportion with a Bachelor's degree or higher grew from 4% in 1950 to 18% in 2005.

ECONOMIC STATUS

- About 3.6 million elderly persons (10.1%) were below the poverty level in 2005. The historic lowest level of 9.7% was reached in 1999. Another 2.3 million or 6.7% of the elderly were classified as "near-poor" (income between the poverty level and 125% of this level).
- The median 2005 income of households with householders 65 and older was; \$26,036, up 2.8 percent, in real terms, from the previous year.
- 81% of householders 65 and older in 2006 owned their homes; only 43 percent for householders younger than 35 owned their own home.
- Older women had a higher poverty rate (12.3%) than older men (7.3%) in 2005. Older persons living alone were much more likely to be poor (19.1%) than were older persons living with families (5.6%). The highest poverty rates were experienced among Hispanic women (45.9%) and also by older Black women (36.7%) who lived alone.
- The major sources of income as reported by the Social Security Administration for older persons in 2004 were: Social Security (reported by 89% of older persons), income from assets (reported by 55%), private pensions (reported by 29%), government employee pensions (reported by 14%), and earnings (reported by 24%).
- Households containing families headed by persons 65+ reported a median income in 2005 of \$37,765 (\$39,402 for non-Hispanic Whites, \$27,270 for African-Americans, \$49,163 for Asians, and \$26,681 for Hispanics).

HEALTH STATUS

- In 2005, 38.3% of non-institutionalized older persons assessed their health as excellent or very good (compared to 66.8% for persons aged 18-64). There was little difference between the sexes on this measure, but African-Americans** (22.8%), older American Indians/Alaska Natives (24.2%) and older Hispanics (28.4%) were less likely to rate their health as excellent or good than were older Whites** (40.9%) or older Asians (34.9%). Most older persons have at least one chronic condition and many have multiple conditions. Among the most frequently occurring conditions older persons in 2004-2005 were: hypertension (48%), diagnosed arthritis (47%), all types of heart disease (29%), any cancer (20%), diabetes (16%), and sinusitis (14%).
- In 2005, almost all (95%) non-institutionalized persons 65+ were covered by Medicare. Medicare covers mostly acute care services and requires beneficiaries to pay part of the cost, leaving about half of health spending to be covered by other sources. About 59% had some type of private health insurance.
- Over 7% had military-based health insurance and 9% of the non-institutionalized elderly were covered by Medicaid, in 2005. Only 1% did not have coverage of some kind. About 87% of non-institutionalized Medicare beneficiaries in 2004 had some type of supplementary coverage. However, among Medicare beneficiaries residing in nursing homes, almost 58% were covered by Medicaid in 2001.
- As the elderly age, they are increasingly affected by memory impairment. Although only a small percentage (4%) of those 65 -69 have moderate or severe memory impairment, more than 20% of those aged 80-84 suffer such impairment and in the 85 and older group, one-third have memory loss and 13% are severely impaired.
- In 2005, over 25% of persons aged 65-74 and 17% of persons 75+ report that they engage in regular leisure-time physical activity. Only 9% reported that they are current smokers and only 4% reported excessive alcohol consumption. Only 2.6% reported that they had experienced psychological distress during the past 30 days.
- Almost 60% reported in 2005 that they received an influenza vaccination during the past 12 months and 56% reported that they had ever received a pneumonia vaccination. About 24% (of persons 60+) report height/weight combinations that place them among the obese.
- Among the leading causes of death of Americans 65 and over are heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, pneumonia/influenza, and diabetes. Heart disease remains the number one killer in this age group despite an almost one-third drop in the number of deaths attributable to heart disease from 2,629 deaths/100,000 in 1980 to 1,795/100,000 in 1998. Deaths from stroke also decreased by more than a third during this time period, but deaths from the other “killers” all increased.

MISCELLANEOUS

- 12.4 million people 65 and over engage in exercise walking, by far the most popular sports activity for this age group, at least six times a year. The next most popular forms of exercise for this age group are exercising with equipment, net fishing and swimming.
- 69,000 people 65 and over enrolled in regular schools 2005.
- Almost 80% of citizens over 65 registered to vote in the 2004 presidential election. More than 70% of the over 65 citizens reported voting; this represented 19% of all ballots cast.
- More than 9 million people over 65 are military veterans.

Survey 2005, Older Americans, Indicators of Well Being, Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Statistics and 65+in the United States – 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau), Administration on Aging: US Department of Health and Human Services . For more information or specific citations, please contact PRC at (202) 467-5030, prc@prcdc.org, 1725 K Street NW, Suite 1102, Washington DC 20006; or visit our website at www.prcdc.org. To unsubscribe to all future PRC mailings reply to this email with “unsubscribe” in the subject line.