

# Older Americans Month 2006

## 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.
- Last year, President Bush stated, "Older Americans teach us the timeless lessons of courage, sacrifice and love. This year the theme for Older Americans Month is "Independence + Dignity + Choice = Healthy Aging".

## THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF OLDER AMERICANS

- In 2004 there were 36.3 million Americans over 65, an increase of 350,000 from 2003, 12 percent of the population. Between 1900 and 2000, the number of Americans 65 or over increased more than tenfold. Census 2000 counted 35 million (20.6 million women and 14.4 million men) or 12.4% of the population who were 65 or over; in 1900 only 3.1 million or 4% of the population reached that age.
- Projections suggest that by 2050 this nation will have 86 million older residents, 21% of the population.
- 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 million in 2000, reaching 4.9 million in 2004.
- In the year 2005, there were 67,500 centenarians in the United States; in 1990 there were only 37,306. About 80% of centenarians are women.
- Florida had the highest proportion of population 65 and over (17%) followed by Pennsylvania (16%), West Virginia (15%) and Iowa (15%) in the 2000 Census. In Alaska, however, only 6.7% of the population was over 65.
- Those 65 and older were 82.5% white, 8% Black, 5% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 4% American Indian and Alaskan Native and .1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. The corresponding proportions in the total population are 75% white, 12.5% Hispanic, 12% Black, .9% American Indian and Alaskan Native, 4% Asian, and .1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander.
- In 2004, 56 percent of the 65 and over population was married, a third was widowed, 8% were divorced and only 4% had never married.
- The profile for men and women, however, was dramatically different. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of men, but only 43% of women 65 and over were married and though only 14 % of the men were widowed, 44% of the women were widowed.
- The living arrangements of men and women 65 and over also reflected distinct patterns. In 2003, 73% of all men in this age group lived with their spouse, while only 50% of women did. More older women lived with

members of their family than did men, 9% versus 5% and more than double the proportion of women than men lived alone, 40% in contrast to 19%. Among those 75 and older almost half (49%) of women lived alone whereas only a fifth (23%) of the men resided alone.

- From 1950 to 2003 the educational attainment of older Americans moved upward every decade. By 2004, 73% 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 19% in 2004. Almost 50,000 people over 65 were enrolled in college in 2004.
- Within the general figures for 2003, there are marked differences in educational attainment by race and ethnicity. Only 51% of older Blacks and 36% of older Hispanics hold a high school diploma or higher, while the comparable figures for whites and Asians and Pacific Islanders are 76% and 70%. Among older Blacks and Hispanics only 10% and 6% hold Bachelor's degrees or higher while 18% of whites and 29 % of Asian and Pacific Islanders in this age group have reached this educational level.

## **ECONOMIC STATUS**

- In 1963, poverty among America's elderly was a catalyst for Older Americans Month. Since that year, the proportion of poor elderly has slowly decreased dropping from about 33% in 1963 to below 15% in 1982 and reaching its lowest figure of 9.9% in 2000. In 2004 the figure was 9.8%.
- The median income of older Americans in 2002 was \$19,436 for males and \$11,406 for females. The median net worth of households over 65 was \$108,885 in 2000. The median income of households over 64 in 2004 was \$24,509, unchanged from last year.
- Among the elderly, 81% own their own homes as opposed to 69% for all householders.
- Poverty in the 65 and over population is more likely to affect women (12% of women as opposed to 7% of men), the non-married (17% as opposed to 5% of the married) and Blacks and Hispanics (22% of each group as opposed to 8% of white elderly).
- Extreme poverty, defined as less than 50% of the poverty threshold or \$4,247 in 2001, for an individual age 65 or over, has hovered near 2% of the older population since 1985. In 2000 it crept up to 2.3% and in 2001 was 2.2%.
- Social security is the largest source of income for all elderly except the wealthiest 20%. In 2001, it accounted for more than 80% of the income of those 65 and older in the lowest two fifths of income level, 65% of the income of the middle fifth, 46% of the fourth and 19% of the highest fifth. Among the wealthiest elderly, asset income, earnings and pensions are larger sources of income than social security. The poorest fifth supplements social security income with public assistance, which accounts for 9% of their income.
- There has been a steady decline in work force participation among people over 65. Only 19% of the men over 65 are in the labor force in 2003 compared to 46% in 1950. This represents 5 million people. Only 10% of women over 65 are in the work force.

## HEALTH STATUS

- Average life expectancy at birth has risen almost 28 years since 1900 when it was 49.2 years reaching 76.9 years in 2000. Life expectancy for men was 74.1 in 2000 an increase from 68.2 in 1950. Among women life expectancy was 79.5 in 2000 up from 71.1 in 1950.
- Life expectancy for those who had reached 65 in 2000 had also increased; older Americans could anticipate living about 18 additional years, an increase of 6 years since 1900. Men would live 16.4 additional years reaching 81. Women could anticipate living until almost 85, an additional 19.4 years.
- These figures, nevertheless, mask important disparities in life expectancy. Women, on average, can expect to live longer than men. In 2000, women's life expectancy was 79.5 years, 5 years longer than the average of 74.1 years for men. White Americans also generally out live Blacks. Life expectancy at birth for whites was 77.4 years; for Blacks it was only 71.7, a five and a half year gap.
- Increased health concerns come with longevity. A recent study from the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) notes that in 2001 self-reports of the status of health show "fairly dramatic differences" between the percentage of 50 to 64 year-olds (55%) and those aged 65 and over (38%) who report their health as "excellent" or "very good".
- Chronic physical conditions plague many older Americans. Those occurring most frequently in people 65 and over in 2000-2001 were: hypertension (49%), arthritic symptoms (36%), all types of heart disease (31%) any cancer (20%), sinusitis (15%) and diabetes (15%).
- 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.
- Mental health issues, in particular depression, also affect those 65 and over. Severe depressive symptoms (four or more of the eight symptoms identified in the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale) have been found in 17% of women age 65-69 and 9% of men in that age group. Among those 80 and older, the proportion increases to over 18% over all with 20% of women and 16% of men showing severe depressive symptoms.
- In 2000, the number of people 65 and over living in nursing homes declined to 4.5 percent of this age group as opposed to 5% in 1990. This decline was sharpest among those 85 and older, among whom only 18% lived in nursing homes in 2000 compared with 25% in 1990.
- The costs for health care faced by those 65 and over, even with Medicare coverage, are significant. Recent studies indicate that out-of pocket costs for a couple over 65, living 20 additional years, are currently \$175,000, a figure that is estimated to rise 8% annually. These costs do not include long-term care cost such as nursing homes or assisted living facilities.
- 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

- Walking is the most popular form of recreation among those 65 and over followed by swimming, exercising with equipment and playing golf.
- Seventy-two percent of those 65 to 74 voted in the 2000 presidential election, the highest rate of any age group.
- More than 40% of people over 65 have a computer in the home and 25% of those over 65 use the Internet.
- 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.

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This factsheet was created in March 2006 by Jane DeLung of the Population Resource Center. Sources include various publications from the U.S. Census Bureau 2000 Census, the Bureau's American Community 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) . For more information or specific citations, please contact PRC at (202) 467-5030, [prc@prcdc.org](mailto:prc@prcdc.org), 1725 K Street NW, Suite 1102, Washington DC 20006; or visit our website at [www.prcdc.org](http://www.prcdc.org). To unsubscribe to all future PRC mailings reply to this email with "unsubscribe" in the subject line.