

Contact: hhs@usc.edu

Tip Sheet: Aging in Community, U.S. Census Bureau

What's the Problem?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau report, the older adult population will continue to grow significantly in the coming years as a result of the aging “baby boom” generation.

The U.S. older adult population (those age 65 and older) increased from 35.9 million in 2003 to 44.7 million in 2013 and is projected to almost double in 2040 to about 82.3 million. Older adults represented 1 in every 7 people in 2013. By 2040, this number is expected to increase to almost 1 in 5 people.

Racial and ethnic minority older adult populations increased from 6.3 million in 2003 to 9.5 million in 2013 and are projected to increase to 21.1 million in 2030. Between 2013 and 2030, older adult, Non-Hispanic, white populations are projected to increase by 50% compared with the much greater 123% for older racial and ethnic minority adult populations.

The more racially and ethnically diverse, aging U.S. population will have wide-ranging implications over the next several decades. The projected growth of the older adult population in the United States will present challenges to policy makers and programs, such as Social Security and Medicare. It will also affect families, businesses, and health care providers. Many aging adults are not prepared for these challenges.

NORC Centers for Public Affairs Research conducted a Long-Term Care Poll and found that most adults age 40 and older feel unprepared for planning or financing long-term care for themselves or a loved one. The majority held misconceptions about how much long-term care they may need in the future and misperceptions on how much that would cost. Few had planned or saved for future needs and/or talked to their families about the issue of aging and their potential needs and costs. Half of polled adults who were age 40 or older reported having concerns over having to leave their homes and move into a nursing home.

Who's at Risk?

The aging U.S. population approaching 65 years of age, as well as their families, and businesses and health care providers. As people live beyond age 65, at least 50% are at risk for having a severe daily living need that will require support.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these trends by severely affecting older adults with key negative impacts on communities of color. With COVID-19, the risk of requiring hospitalization, intensive care, a ventilator to aid with breathing, or death increases with age; the highest risk is for those over 65. In the U.S., eight out of ten reported COVID-19 deaths have been adults over the age of 65. Certain preexisting medical conditions can also increase the risk for severe illness with COVID-19. Therefore, the CDC along with state health departments recommended that adults 65 and over receive a COVID-19 vaccine. The pandemic has also further exposed how structural racism contributes to health inequalities for communities of color, including older adults. In California, for example, among the ages of 65-79, 41% of cases and 49% of deaths were from the Latino community, although they account for only 22% of the state's population.

Can It Be Prevented?

No. As Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard once said, "aging is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced."

However, there are steps that can be taken by aging adults to help prepare for their future:

1. Talk to your family about what's important to you as you age.
2. Make a list of all medications and keep it up to date.
3. Do a walk-through of your home to make sure it's both safe and comfortable.
4. Visit www.eldercare.com to learn about the available resources in your community.
5. Find an activity that is new or fun for you and get active.
6. Make a list of your support team – people in your life who can assist you.
7. Make a list of the things you need help with and ask for help if you need it.
8. Review your finances; are you prepared for the future costs of your own care?
9. Talk to your doctor about any changes in your health.
10. Find out where your local senior center is and pay a visit.

Bottom Line

The U.S. population is projected to grow older over the next several decades. As the U.S. population grows older, the racial and ethnic composition of the older population is also expected to change. We expect to see an increase in the amount of older-adult Hispanics as well as other racial and ethnic minority adult populations. This changing age structure of the population will affect both families and society.

As the composition of the population shifts, the needs of the country may also shift. For instance, smaller shares of total resources potentially could be spent on education while larger shares might be spent on health and caregiving. Policy makers and ultimately, communities, will be responsible for dealing with these evolving changes.

Case Example

Jerome is a policy maker and responsible for overseeing his state's budget. He is aware that as the baby boomer generation becomes older, there will be more resources that will have to be devoted to this population. He looks at the budget to coordinate resources across programs so his state can plan ahead for needs that will arise in the near future.

Resources

- NORC Long-Term Care Poll: <https://www.longtermcarepoll.org/>
- California Department of Aging: <https://www.aging.ca.gov/>
- Coming of Age in an Aging America: <http://theagingamericaproject.com/>
- Frameworks Institute on Aging: <https://vimeo.com/123903462>
- Age-Friendly Communities:
http://www.giaging.org/documents/130402_GIA_AFC_Primer.pdf
- CDC Critical Issue Briefs on Aging: <http://www.cdc.gov/aging/index.html>
- Older Adults, COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html>