

THE NATIONAL CHALLENGE IN AGING

Population Size: The population age 65+ in the United States numbered 35.6 million in 2002, up from 33.9 million in 1996. This group represents 12.8% of the U.S. population, about one in every eight Americans. The ten highest ranking states for percentage of population age 65+ are: Florida (17.2%), Pennsylvania (15.5%), West Virginia (15.3%), North Dakota (14.8%), Iowa (14.8%), Maine (14.4%), South Dakota (14.3%), Rhode Island (14.2%), Arkansas (13.9%), and Montana (13.6%). [1]

Moreover, the older population itself is getting older. In 2000, the 65-74 age group (18.6 million) was eight times larger than in 1900, but the 75-84 group (12.4 million) was 16 times larger and the 85+ group (4.3 million) was 35.5 times larger. The rapid growth in the elderly population of the United States is expected to continue into this century when 20.1% of the population is projected to be 65 years or older by 2030. Americans 85 years and older comprise the fastest growing segment of the population, increasing by about 3% per year, compared to less than 1% growth in the total U.S. population each year. [2] This group tends to experience multiple interacting chronic illnesses and the onset of physical frailty leading to functional decline in one or more activities of daily living. More than half of those age 85+ are so comprised [3].

Living Arrangements: In 2003, about 31% (10.5 million) of non-institutionalized older persons lived alone (7.9 million women, 2.6 million men). Half of women age 75+ live alone. [4] Older people who lived alone had higher poverty rates than those who lived with their spouse (16% of older men and 21% of older women). Living alone also correlates with advanced age. Among women aged 85 and over, for example, three of every five lived outside a family setting. [2] Approximately 10.8 million or 80% of older men, and 10.7 million or 58% of older women, lived with families. The proportion living in a family setting decreased with age. Only 45% of those 85+ years old lived in family setting. About 13% of older persons (7% of men, 17% of women) were not living with a spouse but were living with children, siblings, or other relatives. [5]

Health Status: Most older persons have at least one chronic condition and many have multiple conditions. Frequently occurring conditions in adults age 65+ in 2001 included: hypertension (49.2%), arthritic symptoms (35%), hearing impairments (30%), coronary heart disease (20.4%), any cancer (19.9%), diabetes (15.2%) and stroke (8.6%). [6] Disability takes a much heavier toll on the very old. Almost three-fourths (71.5%) of those age 80+ report at least one disability. Better than half (53.5%) had one or more severe disabilities. The percentage of those age 80+ having difficulty with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) (27.5%) is about double that of the 65+ population in total. [7]

Minority Elders: Minority populations are projected to represent 26.4% of the elderly population in 2030, up from 17.2% in 2002. Between 1999 and 2030, the white population 65+ is projected to increase by 77% compared with 223% for older minorities, including Hispanics (342%), African-Americans (164%), American Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts (207%), and Asians and Pacific Islanders (302%). [8]. Research has consistently documented that minorities have poorer health than do whites. [9] Multiple factors contribute to this situation, including poverty, issues of access to and utilization of health care, issues of individual and institutional racism, lifestyle choices, and inadequate cultural competence by health providers and programs.

Economic Status: There has been a positive trend in the economic status of the older population. Between 1974 and 2002, the median household income for people age 65+ increased (in 2002 dollars) from \$16,882 to \$23,152. The percentage of older people living in poverty declined from 35% in 1959 to 10% in 2002. From 1984 to 2001, the median net worth of households headed by people age 65+ increased by 82% (after accounting for inflation). However, large differences continue to exist between median net worth of white and minority households, with net worth of older white households being 5 times larger than that of older black households. [10]

References:

- 1 U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 Population Estimates
2. U.S. Census, 2000.
3. Nutting, 1991
4. Administration on Aging, A Statistical Profile of Older Americans Aged 65+, August 2003
5. Older Americans 2004, Key Indicators of Well Being, Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics, November 2004
6. The State of Aging and Health in America 2004, CDC and Merck Institute of Aging and Health
- 7 U.S. Census Bureau, 1997
8. U.S. Census Bureau Internet Release, January 2004
- 9 (Healthy People 2010, 2000)
10. (Older Americans 2004, Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics)