

2006 Rural Aging Conference

Hosted by: The University of Iowa Center on Aging

Date: Tuesday, October 3rd

Time: 8:00am to 4:00pm (Agenda available soon)

Keynote Speaker: Graham D. Rowles, Ph.D.
Professor and Director, Graduate Center for Gerontology
University of Kentucky

At the University of Kentucky, Dr. Rowles is Director, PhD Program in Gerontology; and Associate at the Center for Rural Health; and the Associate Director for Social & Behavioral Sciences Sanders-Brown Center on Aging. His research interests include aging in rural environments, elderly relocation and migration, long-term care and nursing home environments, and also the meaning of 'place.'

Aging Boomers in Changing Rural Environments: Perspectives from the Kentucky Elder Readiness Initiative (KERI)

In 2006 the first of the 83 million Americans who comprise the Baby Boom generation (persons born between 1946 and 1964) will turn 60. As this very large cohort (30% of the United States population in 2000) retires and ages there are likely to be profound changes in society as we accommodate the later years of a generation that will be healthier, better educated, and more politically powerful than any of its predecessors. The new old age will involve elders starting businesses, embarking on new careers, and fulfilling lifelong passions that will take them in very different directions from their traditional working career. While the aging of the Baby Boomers provides new opportunities, it also presents new challenges. Major concerns exist regarding potential shortages of labor due to the much smaller size of the cohort that will follow the Boomers when they retire. As the Boomers move into their later years there are concerns regarding the provision of adequate health care and long-term care. Finally, it is unclear how the very fabric of American social structure will accommodate a generation of elders whose experience of aging is likely to be very different from their predecessors.

How will these trends play out in rural areas? Are rural states prepared to face the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities provided by the aging of the Baby Boomers? Is Iowa ready?

Across the country, individual states and communities are conducting studies and needs assessments to anticipate the implications of some of the changes and to gauge the sentiments of public officials, providers, and the Baby Boomers themselves with regard to pending changes. The Kentucky Elder Readiness Initiative (KERI), a two-year project involving collaboration between the Graduate Center for Gerontology at the University of Kentucky, the Division of Aging Services of the Cabinet of Health and Family Services, and all 15 of the state's Area Agencies on Aging, is conducting focus groups and community forums throughout this very rural state. KERI also involves the compilation of a data base and a series of community surveys to assess needs and opportunities. A focus on four domains—community resources, health and safety, quality of life, and community involvement—provides an orienting framework for a project that seeks to enhance awareness and stimulate the development of local grass roots initiatives to address the implications of the aging of the Baby Boomers.

This keynote address will document and consider implications of the aging of Baby Boomers in rural Iowa against the backdrop of changing rural society. Findings from KERI that are pertinent to rural Iowa will be shared. The presentation will conclude with a series of suggestions regarding directions that might be taken in rural Iowa to ensure positive outcomes from the massive demographic transition that is upon us.

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