

The Aging Population

As we celebrate 'Older Americans Month' in May, we reflect on a recent report released by the U.S. Census Bureau and commissioned by the National Institute on Aging (NIA) on the aging population in the United States. The study reports that the face of aging is changing dramatically and rapidly. Older Americans are very different from their predecessors; they are living longer, having lower rates of disability, achieving higher levels of education and less often living in poverty. The baby boomers, the first of whom celebrated their 60th birthdays in 2006, promise to redefine further what it means to grow older in America. This briefing paper highlights these findings and presents added data on the District of Columbia's aging residents.

Among the trends highlighted were the following:

- The U.S. population age 65 and over is expected to double in size within the next 25 years. By 2030, almost 1-out-of-5 Americans - some 72 million people - will be 65 years or older. The age group 85 and older is now the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population.
- The health of older Americans is improving. Still, many are disabled and suffer from chronic conditions. The proportion with a disability fell significantly from 26.2 percent in 1982 to 19.7 percent in 1999. But 14 million people age 65 and older reported some level of disability in Census 2000, mostly linked to a high prevalence of chronic conditions such as heart disease or arthritis.
- The financial circumstances of older people have improved dramatically, although there are wide variations in income and wealth. The proportion of people aged 65 and older in poverty decreased from 35 percent in 1959 to 10 percent in 2003, mostly attributed to the support of Social Security. In 2000, the poorest fifth of senior households had a net worth of \$3,500 (\$44,346 including home equity) and the wealthiest had \$328,432 (\$449,800 including home equity).
- Florida (17.6 percent), Pennsylvania (15.6 percent) and West Virginia (15.3 percent) are the "oldest" states, with the highest percentages of people age 65 and older. Charlotte County, Fla., (34.7 percent) has the highest concentration of older residents and McIntosh County, N.D., (34.2 percent) ranks second.
- Higher levels of education, which are linked to better health, higher income, more wealth and a higher standard of living in retirement, will continue to increase among people 65 and older. The proportion of Americans with at least a bachelor's degree grew five-fold from 1950 to 2003, from 3.4 percent to 17.4 percent; and by 2030, more than one-fourth of the older population is expected to have an undergraduate degree. The percentage completing high school quadrupled from 1950 to 2003, from 17 percent to 71.5 percent.
- As the United States, as a whole grows more diverse, so does the population age 65 and older. In 2003, older Americans were 83 percent non-Hispanic white, 8 percent black, 6 percent Hispanic and 3 percent Asian. By 2030, an estimated 72 percent of older Americans will be non-Hispanic white, 11 percent Hispanic, 10 percent black and 5 percent Asian.
- Changes in the American family have significant implications for future aging. Divorce, for example, is on the rise, and some researchers suggest that fewer chil-

AGING POPULATION *cont. on page 2*

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AGING POPULATION from page 1

dren and more stepchildren may change the availability of family support in the future for people at older ages. In 1960, only 1.6 percent of older men and 1.5 percent of women age 65 and older were divorced; but by 2003, 7 percent of older men and 8.6 percent of older women were divorced and had not remarried. The trend may be continuing. In 2003, among people in their early 60s, 12.2 percent of men and 15.9 percent of women were divorced.

The importance of these findings was aptly summarized by the following two quotes from the directors of the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the US Census Bureau. "The collection, analysis and reporting of reliable data are critical to informing policy as the nation moves ahead to address the challenges and opportunities of an aging population," says NIA Director Richard J. Hodes, M.D. He continues, "This report tells us that we have made a lot of progress in improving the health and well-being of older Americans, but there is much left to do." The Census Bureau Director Louis Kincannon reports, "The social and economic implications of an aging population - and of the baby boom in particular - are likely to be profound for both individuals and society."

Aging in the District of Columbia

For the District of Columbia, the trend has generally been similar to the national trend.

- The 65 years and older population grew from 11,734 in 1900, peaked at 77,847 in 1990, and declined to 69,898 in 2000 (Table 1). As a percent of the population,

the 65 years and older age group represented 4.2 percent of the District's population in 1900 and continued on a generally upward trend to 12.2 percent in 2000 (Figure 1).

- Most of the 65 and older population in the District reside in Ward 5 (12,924), followed by Ward 4 (12,692) and Ward 3 (10,138) (Table 2). Ward 8 had the least number of persons in this age group (4,554).
- Blacks comprised 69 percent of the 65 and older in 2000, whites comprised 27 percent, and other races 4 percent.

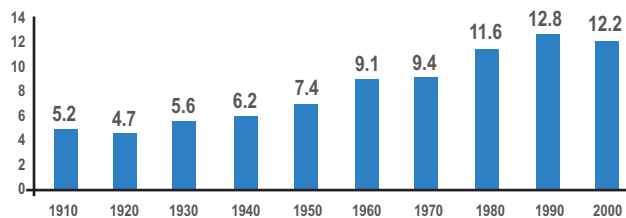
- 14.4 percent of the population 65 years and over live on incomes that are below the poverty level.
- Over 3,000 of the population 65 years and over were in nursing homes in 2000.
- Heart disease and cancer are the two leading causes of death for the 65 and over age group.
- Physical disability is most prevalent among the 65 and older population. In census 2000, 33 percent of the 65 and older population had a physical disability; 13 percent had a sensory disability; and 13 percent had some mental disability.

Table 1: Total Population and Older Population by Age for the District of Columbia 1900 to 2000

Year	Total Population	65 Years and Older Number	Percent
1900	278,718	11,734	4.2%
1910	331,069	17,017	5.2%
1920	437,571	20,635	4.7%
1930	486,869	27,253	5.6%
1940	663,091	41,206	6.2%
1950	802,178	56,687	7.1%
1960	763,956	69,143	9.1%
1970	756,510	70,803	9.4%
1980	638,333	74,287	11.6%
1990	606,900	77,847	12.8%
2000	572,059	69,898	12.2%

Source: DC Office of Planning and US Census Bureau

Figure 1: Percent Population Age 65 and Older: 1990-2000



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Government of the District of Columbia

Table 2: District of Columbia Population 65 Years and Over Census 2000

Ward	Population 65 Years and Over Number	Percent
1	5,684	7.7%
2	6,272	9.1%
3	10,138	13.8%
4	12,692	17.1%
5	12,924	17.8%
6	7,785	11.4%
7	9,849	14.0%
8	4,554	6.4%

Source: DC Office of Planning and US Census Bureau