



Facts on Aging

The Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy

Florida State University

The population of older Americans is getting older, with the number of Americans over age 85 increasing faster than any other group. Since 1900, the proportion of Americans age 65 and older has more than tripled. Life expectancy for men is now 73 years; for women, it is 80 years.

Changing Numbers —————

- The older population – persons 65 years or older – numbered 35.9 million in 2003. They represented 12.3% of the U.S. population, about one in every eight Americans.
- By 2030, there will be about 71.5 million older persons, more than twice their number in 2000. People 65+ represented 12.4% of the population in the year 2000 but are expected to grow to be 20% of the population by 2030.

Source: U.S. Administration on Aging

- The median age of the U.S. population continued to rise, from 35.3 years on April 1, 2000, to 35.9 years on July 1, 2003.
- One of the most striking characteristics of the older population is the change in the ratio of men to women as people age. In 2002, 26.6 million men and 33.0 million women in the civilian noninstitutionalized population were aged 55 and over, yielding a sex ratio (men per 100 women) of 81. The sex ratio drops steadily with age. In the 55-to-64 age group, the sex ratio was 92, and in the age group 85 years and over, the sex ratio was 46.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Living in Poverty? —————

- Poverty rates among the elderly have declined sharply over the past 50 years. Census data show that the percentage of Americans ages 65 and over with incomes below the poverty level declined from 35% in 1959 to just over 10% in 2002.

Source: Bureau of the Census 2005.

- However, the figure is 33 percent for African-Americans, 22 percent for Hispanics, and 20

percent for adults over age 85. Among the latter group, women outnumber men almost 2:1.

Source: American Psychological Association; U.S. Census Bureau

Education —————

- Newly eligible retirees are increasingly better educated. Among those who reached age 62 in 1993–97, 27 percent were high school dropouts, 56 percent were high school graduates, and 17 percent were college graduates. In contrast, for the early baby boomer birth cohorts, who will be 62 in 2008–2012, 30 percent are college graduates and only 12 percent high school dropouts.

Source: Urban Institute

Caring for Others —————

- Adults age 55 and older contribute \$162 billion worth of volunteering and unpaid caregiving annually. Caring for family members – spouses, grandchildren and parents - absorbed more than 61 percent (or \$99.6 billion) of the total value of unpaid activities, based on moderate-cost assumptions, in 2002. Older Americans contributed \$44.3 billion through formal volunteering with an organization and \$17.8 billion by informally helping others in need.

Source: Urban Institute

- In 2000, almost 400,000 grandparents over 65 years old were the persons with primary responsibility for their grandchildren who lived with them.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

- Nearly one out of every four U.S. households (23 percent, or 22.4 million) provides care to a relative or friend aged 50 or older.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics

- About 633,000 grandparents aged 65 or over maintained households in which grandchildren were present in 1997. In addition, 510,000 grandparents over 65 years lived in parent-maintained households in which their grandchildren were present.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

- The percentage of older men who are current smokers declined from 29 percent in 1965 to 10 percent in 2002. The corresponding percentage for women has remained relatively constant, declining slightly from 10 percent in 1965 to 9 percent in 2002.

Source: *Older Americans 2004: Key Indicators of Well-Being*, compiled by the Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics

Health Issues

- In 2002, close to one-half of all older men and nearly one-third of older women reported trouble hearing without a hearing aid. Vision problems, even with glasses or contact lenses, affected 18 percent of the older population, specifically 16 percent of men and 19 percent of women.

“Much of the current Social Security reform debate emphasizes the economic cost of an aging population and the importance of encouraging work at older ages. But the debate generally ignores the significant unpaid activities undertaken by older Americans.”

Johnson and Schaner: Value of Unpaid Activities by Older Americans Tops \$160 Billion Per Year

- The increase in the prevalence of overweight and obesity among older adults has been dramatic. In 1999-2002, 69 percent of Americans age 65 and over were overweight or obese. In the last two decades, the increases among those age 65-74 have been especially striking. Between 1976-1980 and 1999-2002, the percentage of people age 65-74 who were overweight or obese rose from 57 percent to 73 percent; the percentage who were obese doubled from 18 percent to 36 percent.

- Older Americans consume a disproportionately large share of both prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. Americans age 65 and older constitute only 13 percent of the U.S. population yet account for 30 percent of all prescription drugs and 25% of all OTC drugs purchased.

Source: AARP - *The Policy Book*, 2004

- Between 1982 and 2002, the share of adults age 65 to 74 who described their health as fair or poor declined from 34 percent to 22 percent. These self-reported trends are consistent with other evidence of improved health at middle age and beyond over the past 25 years.

Source: *National Center for Health Statistics*, 2005



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