

# Highlights

## Population Profile and Growth

- Our Nation's population continues to age. In 1860, half the population was under age 20; in 1994, half were age 34 or older; by 2030, at least half could be 39 years or older.
- In July 1994, there were 33.2 million elderly (aged 65 or older), one-eighth of the total population. Among the elderly, 18.7 million were aged 65 to 74, 11.0 million were aged 75 to 84, and 3.5 million were 85 or older.
- The elderly population increased 11-fold from 1900 to 1994, compared with only a 3-fold increase for those under age 65. Elderly population growth rates for the 1990-2010 period will be modest, but during the 2010-30 period, elderly growth rates will increase dramatically as the Baby-Boom generation ages into the 65 and over group.
- From 1960 to 1994, the oldest old population (persons aged 85 and over) increased by 274 percent, compared with 100 percent for the 65 and over, and 45 percent for the total population. The oldest old population in 1994 would more than double to 7 million in 2020 under middle series projections. The oldest old would reach 19 million by 2050, or as many as 27 million under the Census Bureau's "highest series" assumptions of future life expectancy and net immigration.
- The number of centenarians, persons aged 100 years or older, has grown rapidly in recent years. This group has more than doubled since 1980. About 4 in 5 centenarians are women.
- California had the largest number of persons aged 65 or older in 1993 (3.3 million), yet its proportion elderly ranked 46th among the States and the District of Columbia. Florida, Pennsylvania, and States in the Midwest are among the States with the highest proportions elderly. Florida had by far the largest proportion elderly (18.6 percent) in 1993.
- Eight States would double their elderly population between 1993 and 2020. Seven of these States are in the West. The slowest-growing elderly population States are expected to be in the Midwest and Northeast.
- The five States with the highest proportions of oldest old in 1993 were all in the Midwest: Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas.
- 11 of the 12 States in the Midwest were net losers of elderly migrants between 1985 and 1990. Among the 25 States with net elderly immigration, 22 were in the South and West.
- The elderly represented 20 percent or more of the population in over 400 counties of the United States in 1991. The elderly were 30 percent or more of the population in 11 counties, 6 of which were in Florida.
- The ratio of elderly persons to those of working age (20 to 64 years) for the nation will nearly double between 1990 and 2050.
- 357 million people in the world were aged 65 or older in 1994, about 6 percent of the world's total population.
- Worldwide, the elderly grew by 2.8 percent during 1993-94, compared with only 1.6 percent for the world's total population. The rate of elderly population growth is more rapid in developing countries than in developed countries. Over half the world's elderly lived in developing nations in 1994, and nearly two-thirds of the world's elderly are projected to live in such countries by 2020.

## Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Diversity and Change

- Racial and ethnic diversity within the elderly population will continue to increase. The proportion of the elderly that is White, non-Hispanic is projected to decline from 87 percent in 1990 to 67 percent in 2050. Among the elderly in 2050, 10 percent would be Black, non-Hispanic; 7 percent Asian and Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic; less than 1 percent American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut, non-Hispanic; and 16 percent Hispanic.
- Among elderly Blacks and Hispanics, about 1 in 5 were 80 years or older in 1990. By 2050, these proportions could increase to 30 percent for elderly Blacks and 36 percent for elderly Hispanics. The proportion aged 80 years and over among elderly Whites would be even higher (40 percent).
- In 1990, 12 percent of all elderly persons spoke some language other than English at home. Spanish speakers will become an increasing share of the elderly population that speaks a language other than English at home.
- Income and poverty differences are significant for population subgroups. Elderly White men had

higher median income in 1992 than other population subgroups of the elderly. The 1992 poverty rates were higher for elderly Blacks (33 percent) and Hispanics (22 percent) than for Whites (11 percent).

- Gender and racial gaps in life expectancy at birth persist. Life expectancy at birth in 1991 was about 80 years for White females, 74 years for Black females, 73 years for White males, and 65 years for Black males.
- In the United States, there were 3 elderly women to every 2 elderly men in 1994, and 5 oldest old women to every 2 oldest old men. Globally, there were 50 million more elderly women than men in 1994, and elderly women outnumbered men 4 to 3.
- Elderly White men are more likely to commit suicide (44 per 100,000 population) than to die in a motor vehicle accident (31 per 100,000 population).
- Elderly men are more likely to smoke, smoke heavily, drink, and drink heavily than elderly women. Elderly Black men are about twice as likely to smoke as elderly White men.
- Elderly women are less likely than men to live in a family setting. After age 75, most women are widowed and live alone, while most men are married and live with their wives.
- Women's share of the older labor force (55 years and over) increased from 23 percent in 1950 to 44 percent in 1993.
- Elderly women (16 percent) were more likely to be poor in 1992 than elderly men (9 percent). Of the 2.3 million elderly poor who lived alone in 1992, 2.0 million were women.

### Health, Social, and Economic Profile

- Poor health is not as prevalent as many assume, especially among the young old. Among noninstitutionalized persons in 1992, three in four aged 65 to 74 consider their health to be good, very good, or excellent, as do about 2 in 3 aged 75 and over.
- Noninstitutionalized elderly persons reporting the need for personal assistance with everyday activities in 1990-91 increased with age, from only 9 percent of persons aged 65 to 69 up to 50 percent of the oldest old.
- In 1990, elderly with a self-care or mobility limitation were more likely to be poor (20 percent) than elderly without such limitations (11 percent).
- Eighty percent of newborns would survive to age 65 under the mortality conditions of 1991.
- About 7 in 10 persons who died in 1991 were age 65 or older. Heart disease is still the leading cause of death among the elderly, even though heart disease death rates have declined from 1960 levels.
- In 1990, 1.6 million elderly (or 5 percent of all elderly) lived in nursing homes. Ninety percent of all nursing home residents are elderly; 7 in 10 are female; and 1 in 3 is a woman aged 85 or over.
- Of all oldest old persons, nearly one-fourth (24 percent) lived in a nursing home in 1990.
- In 1992, 70 percent of elderly reported voting in the presidential election.
- The share of older workers in the nation's labor force declined between 1950 and 1993.
- Median income of the elderly in 1992 (\$14,548 for men, \$8,189 for women) more than doubled since 1957 (in constant 1992 dollars). Social Security benefits were the primary source of income for 63 percent of beneficiaries in 1992, and were the only source of income for 14 percent of beneficiaries.
- The percentage of elderly living in poverty declined from 24.6 percent in 1970 to 12.9 percent in 1992, partly because of "catch-up" increases in Social Security benefits and the indexing of benefits to inflation rates.
- Elderly not living with relatives or living alone were more likely to be poor (25 percent) in 1992 than elderly persons in married couple families (6 percent).
- Most elderly householders (77 percent) owned their own homes in 1991, and their median net worth was more than 15 times that of households with a householder under age 35.

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## Future Implications

- Tomorrow's elderly will have quite different social, demographic, health, and economic characteristics than today's elderly.
- The sheer size and inevitable aging of the Baby-Boom generation will continue to drive public policy debate.
- Research on genetic, biochemical, and physiological aspects of aging is certain to alter the future world of the elderly. Issues pertaining to ethics and aging are likely to receive increasing attention.
- Educational attainment levels of the elderly population will increase in the coming decades, especially as relatively well-educated Baby Boom cohorts reach older age.
- Baby-Boom women are likely to experience widowhood later in life than today's elderly women, and more may be divorced or never have married.
- Women will be increasingly likely to have been in the labor force long enough to have their own retirement income.
- As average length of life continues to increase, issues regarding the quality of extended life (active life expectancy) are likely to assume greater importance.