

## **The Appalachian Commission: The Aging of Appalachia**

*This report uses data from Census 2000 to show how and why the age structure of the Appalachian population differs from the national average and varies within the Region. The report examines implications for the region and argues that they are not all negative. The changing age structure will be an important fact of life for decision-makers in both the public and private sectors in Appalachia in coming years.*

### **Lead Agency:**

Appalachian Regional Commission

### **Agency Mission:**

The Appalachian Regional Commission's mission is to be an advocate for and partner with the people of Appalachia to create opportunities for self-sustaining economic development and improved quality of life.

### **Principal Investigator:**

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### **Partner Agency:**

Population Reference Bureau

### **General Description:**

**The Aging of Appalachia**, by John Haaga, Population Reference Bureau, July 2004. This report uses data from Census 2000 to show how and why the age structure of the Appalachian population differs from the national average and varies within the Region. The report examines implications for the region and argues that they are not all negative. The changing age structure will be an important fact of life for decisionmakers in both the public and private sectors in Appalachia in coming years. In 2000, 14.3 percent of Appalachian residents were ages 65 and over, compared with 12.4 percent of all U.S. residents. Northern Appalachia had the oldest population among the subregions, with

16.0 percent ages 65 and over. Pennsylvania and West Virginia ranked second and third among states in 2000 in the percentage of their population ages 65 and over; only Florida ranked higher. The major reason for the difference in age structure between the Appalachian population and that of the United States as a whole is the net out-migration of young adults from Appalachia to other parts of the country, and Appalachia's relatively low share of immigrants from other countries. Three of the four Appalachian subregions analyzed here had disability rates—overall, mobility, and self-care—generally somewhat higher than those for elderly people in the nation as a whole. The sub-regions of Appalachia vary widely in poverty rates among older people. High poverty rates among elderly people living alone are a particular problem for the Appalachian region, where higher proportions of older people live alone than the national average. Poverty rates for the over-65 population were fairly close to the national average in southwestern Pennsylvania, southern West Virginia, and western North Carolina, but poverty rates were higher for the over-65 population as a whole and for all subgroups in eastern Kentucky. The oldest-old, those ages 85 and over, were more likely to be poor than the entire over-65 population. Demographic projections prepared by Regional Economic Models, Inc., show that, with current trends, the Appalachian region will be home to over 5 million people ages 65 and over in 2025, just under 20 percent of the total population. One of every 40 Appalachian residents will be among the oldest old, those ages 85 and over, in 2025. As is currently the case, Northern Appalachia is expected in 2025 to have a significantly older population than the rest of the region and the nation as a whole, with 23.5 percent of its population ages 65 and over. The report assesses both the service and fiscal demands of the higher regional proportion of older people on state and local governments, but also looks at the economic development potential of the "young old" (those ages 60 to 75) who may actually bring more retirement assets than demands to localities, and who may bring skills and experience into regional labor markets through "bridge jobs" in their retirement.

***Excellence:***           What makes this project exceptional?

The report examines the regional dynamics of population change and aging in place and the economic development implications for a high poverty region.

***Significance:***           How is this research relevant to older persons, populations and/or an aging society?

It examines both the regional actuarial demands of an aging population and the potential economic development opportunities of the younger cohort of the senior population.

***Effectiveness:***           What is the impact and/or application of this research to older persons?

It has been used by the Local Development Districts for policy and planning purposes in both retirement destination communities, as well as fiscally strapped communities in the northern sub-region of Appalachia.

***Innovativeness:*** Why is this research exciting or newsworthy?

It examines both the regional actuarial demands of an aging population and the potential economic development opportunities of the younger cohort of the senior population. This finding is, by and large, lacking in most journalistic and policy discussions of the implications of aging.