

## Executive Summary

The Texas Department on Aging's<sup>1</sup> report on the *State of the State on Aging* is an objective, definitive resource on aging issues for state and local policy-makers. The basic framework is a concept called *Aging Texas Well*, which poses the question, *What should we be doing to give Texans opportunities to age well?* This summary of the 201-page report addresses demographics, wellness, current gaps, coordination, and recommendations for public awareness, coordination and partnerships, research, and policy changes.

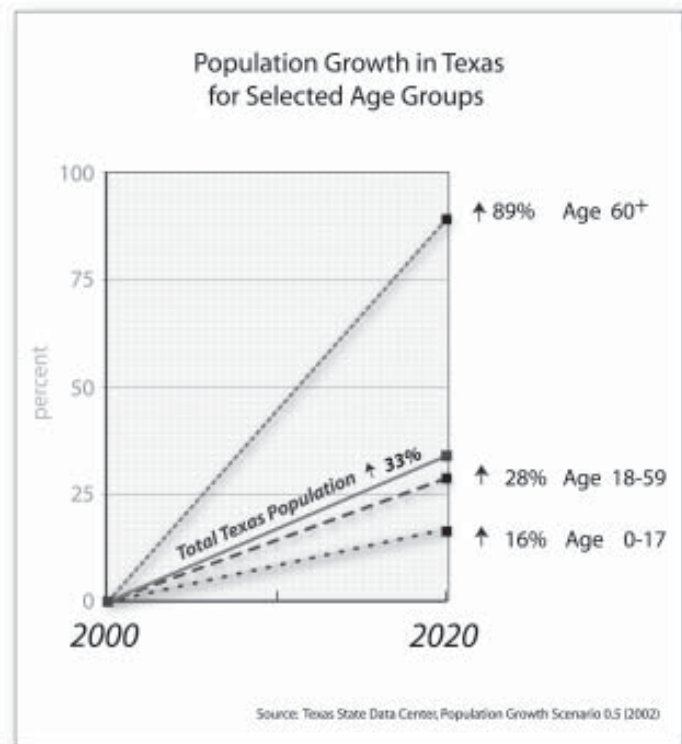
### Signs of the Times for Older Texans

The life expectancy of Texans — now at 76.9 years — is rising dramatically, fueled by medical advances, improved public health, better nutrition, and wellness lifestyles. Today's 65-year olds can expect to live another 17.9 years. Texas will have 100 older females for every 86 men in 2020.

The 60-plus age group is becoming increasingly diverse. Minority elders will rise from 29% to 39% by 2020 with Hispanics driving this trend, jumping from 18% to 25%.

Baby Boomers are driving the expected 89% growth in the 60-plus population from 2000 to 2020. Older Texans will represent 20% of the state's total population, up from 13% in 2000.

Older adults wield political clout, exemplified by the fact that nearly 70% of the 65-74 age group voted in the 2000 U.S. election compared to 44% of the 25-34 group.



As Texas looks at the signs of the times, a key question arises: ***Does more life equal better lives?***

- 31% of senior Texans have no prescription drug coverage;
- Seniors caring for grandchildren rose by 76% between 1970-97;
- 41% percent of Texas Baby Boomers fear outliving their retirement savings;
- 39% percent of Boomers are concerned about just making ends meet;
- In 2000, Texas had fewer than 100 doctors with a geriatric focus; and,
- 13% of elder Texans 65-plus still live at or below the poverty level.

Several trends may impact these problems:

- Many older Texans want to stay in the workforce longer;
- Social institutions, historically age-specific in clientele, are reinventing themselves;
- Assisted-living is diversifying to provide affordable alternatives to nursing homes;
- Older Texans are realizing that physical activity can diminish health problems; and
- The advertising industry is increasingly targeting older men and women.

## **Aging Texas Well**

Initiated in 1996 and endorsed by the 75th Legislature (SCR 36), ***Aging Texas Well*** helps Texans prepare for retirement and aging from a holistic perspective, addressing all aspects of life. The keys to a Texas that ages well are state and local partnerships and infrastructures that identify and address public policy issues as well as needs and services.

### **Individual Preparedness in the Following Aspects of Life...**

<b>Physical:</b>	Achieving and maintaining the best possible physical health.
<b>Mental:</b>	Achieving and maintaining the best possible mental health.
<b>Social:</b>	Balancing interaction among individuals, family and community.
<b>Spiritual:</b>	Having a personal belief system that provides meaning and purpose.
<b>Financial:</b>	Achieving and maintaining an adequate income by managing resources.
<b>Legal:</b>	Managing personal-family life through preparation for major life decisions.

### **Social Infrastructure: Laws, Policies and Services that Create Opportunities For...**

<b>Employment:</b>	Workforce participation without age-based biases or barriers.
<b>Education:</b>	Intellectual growth and life-long learning.
<b>Volunteerism:</b>	Meaningful service within a wide range of civic and educational settings.
<b>Recreation:</b>	Activities of personal interest that provide enrichment and enjoyment.
<b>Housing:</b>	Personal residences that are affordable, accessible and integrated.
<b>Community Supports:</b>	Services and assistance that allow for independent living.
<b>Transportation:</b>	Safe and affordable movement in communities that are accessible.
<b>Health/Long-Term Care:</b>	Access to preventive, acute and chronic care services.
<b>Caregiving:</b>	Support for family members and other persons providing care and assistance.
<b>Protections:</b>	Personal safety and freedom from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

## ***Gaps and Coordination of Current Services<sup>2</sup>***

A recent survey of state agencies by the Texas Department on Aging revealed that some services and programs for older Texans are not available in all counties; lack the resources/funding to meet all eligible clients/needs; or are not sufficient or appropriate in terms of quantity or level. TDoA plans to conduct follow-up research on this issue.

## ***Is Texas State Government Ready?<sup>3</sup>***

The 2001 survey of state agencies by TDoA revealed that most agencies are aware of the expected increase in the absolute numbers of older persons and the potential impact on the demand for services. However, many agencies acknowledge that addressing the issues and needs of an aging Texas requires a realignment of internal resources, collaborative efforts and partnerships, information and data gathering, and innovative ways of delivering services. TDoA plans to conduct follow-up research on this issue.

## ***Are Local Communities Ready?***

There are no “average” communities in Texas. Each requires individual assessments of its infrastructure and development of local strategies. In FY 2002, the Texas Department on Aging awarded grants to several communities in Texas to help them assess and develop specific strategies to build their capacity to support an older population.

## **Future Directions**

In the review of the various aspects of *Aging Texas Well*, in the State of the State on Aging report, many common themes emerged that indicate a need for action, including public awareness, coordination and partnerships, research, and policy change. Following are examples discussed in-depth in the report.



### ***PUBLIC AWARENESS***

- ★ **Physical Health:** Encourage older Texans through media campaigns to adopt healthy behaviors such as smoking cessation, physical exercise, proper nutrition and weight control.
- ★ **Mental Health:** Educate older adults and their caregivers to recognize signs and symptoms of mental illness, and to know when to seek help.
- ★ **Spirituality:** Reach out to the faith-based communities to increase public awareness of aging issues.
- ★ **Social Engagement:** Educate different population groups of older Texans about the importance of social engagement.
- ★ **Legal Awareness:** Form public-private sector partnerships to educate older Texans about the need for legal planning, legal rights, and available low-cost legal assistance.

- ★ **Volunteerism:** Develop innovative programs that get older adults involved in local volunteer activities.
- ★ **Recreation:** Create awareness of the recreation activities available in the state's communities.
- ★ **Education:** Educate older Texans about the numerous educational opportunities available in their communities.
- ★ **Housing:** Heighten public awareness of the housing services available for older Texans and the opportunities to address housing issues at the local level.
- ★ **Community Supports:** Increase public awareness of information and referral services available through the health and human services agencies.
- ★ **Employment:** Initiate public-private partnerships to raise awareness among older Texans about available employment services and job training opportunities.
- ★ **Transportation:** Educate older adults on available transportation options that enhance safety and mobility.



### **COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS**

Partnerships and coordination among organizations are crucial in implementing *Aging Texas Well*. Following are examples discussed in the individual chapters of the full report.

- ★ **Physical Health:** The Texas Department on Aging and Texas Department of Health continue working together to focus on the needs of older adults in future organizational, planning and policy activities.
- ★ **Mental health:** The Texas Mental Health and Aging Coalition continue addressing the needs of older Texas by asserting the importance of emotional well-being, prevention and self-help programs, and promoting the use of services available.
- ★ **Recreation:** Private, public, and faith-based organizations coordinate to reduce or waive recreational fees for older Texans.
- ★ **Transportation:** Federal, state, local levels share the task of improving transportation for older adults by creating safer infrastructures, increasing use of volunteers and faith-based groups in providing services, and improving access to alternative transportation.
- ★ **Caregiving:** State, local communities and the private sector work closer together to promote supportive work environments for caregivers such as flextime, telecommuting, job sharing, and compressed workweeks.
- ★ **Housing:** Encourage local collaboration between housing authorities, for-profit and nonprofit affordable housing groups, support services providers, and the aging network, creating a structural linkage that helps ensure access to services for older Texans.

- ★ **Workforce:** The Texas Workforce Commission and Local Workforce Development Boards create cooperative agreements with the Area Agencies on Aging that result in an integrated, effective workforce system for older workforce development participants.



## **RESEARCH**

Public policy requires a knowledge base that is up-to-date. A core function of the TDoA Office of Aging Policy and Information is research. Following are a few examples from the full report of research needs.

- ★ **Recreation:** Address how specific activities are adapted to meet the changing circumstances people encounter as they grow older.
- ★ **Physical Health:** Address the critical knowledge gaps that exist for responding to the health needs of older adults.
- ★ **Transportation:** Undertake a study of unmet consumer needs for individuals seeking transportation -- including the exact nature of issues facing non-drivers — to help decision-makers formulate policies needed to address this issue.
- ★ **Caregiving:** Identify and understand caregiver needs, laying the foundation for better management of caregiver resources and service operations at the state and local levels.



## **POLICY CHANGES**

Following are a number of issues that policy-makers must address in serving older Texans, many of which require legislative action. The report contains more details on these issues.

- ★ **Legal:** Increase access to legal assistance.
- ★ **Physical Health:** Continue to promote disease-management strategies in public and private health programs.
- ★ **Health Care Workforce:** Provide incentives to increase the supply of geriatric providers and establish core competencies in geriatric training.
- ★ **Mental Health:** Improve access to preventive and emergency mental health treatment.
- ★ **Health Care Services:**
  - Continue funding and support for implementation of the Promoting Independence Plan.
  - Continue to expand the role of long-term care ombudsmen in assisted living facilities.
  - Address the issue of liability insurance for nursing facilities.
- ★ **Housing:** Promote housing accessibility and affordability in local communities.

- ★ **Community Supports:** Develop a single point of reference, through TDoA, for the wide array of information for older Texans and their families by creating a partnership among state agencies to support a web-and phone-based information, assistance and referral system.
- ★ **Education:** Provide adult education providers special training on how to address the unique learning styles of older adults.
- ★ **Transportation:** Consider making it easier for older Texans to afford automobile insurance, and making the road more senior-friendly.

### ***Funding Needs***

The full report references numerous areas where additional funding would help meet the needs of older Texans. These range from home and community-based programs at the Texas Department of Human Services to improved Internet access to more transportation options. Aging stakeholders as well as individual agencies will be working with the 78th legislature on how to best allocate limited resources to meet these and other needs of Texas.

### **Conclusion**

As Texas begins the 21st Century, older Texans constitute one of the state's most valuable resources. The *State of Our State on Aging* report outlines many opportunities to improve the lives of older Texans, some of which simply require a little focus and attention in the right places through public awareness-building or research. Other opportunities require tough decisions by policy-makers regarding new legislation or funding increases for programs. This report focuses attention on the critical issues and provides information to help make these decisions. The Texas Department on Aging is committed to helping bring about the change necessary to make *Aging Texas Well* not just a slogan, but a reality for state government, communities, and individual Texans.

Copies of the full report are available by calling the Texas Department of Aging at (512) 424-6840, by visiting our website, [www.tdoa.state.tx.us](http://www.tdoa.state.tx.us), or writing to us at P.O. Box 12786, Austin, Texas 78711.

### ★ **Endnotes**

---

<sup>1</sup> The Texas Department on Aging operates under both federal and state laws, dedicated to serving Texans 60 and older. TDoA thanks the many organizations and individuals that provided their ideas and comments on issues.

<sup>2</sup> Texas Department on Aging, *Gaps and Coordination of Services for Older Texans: Survey Results* (Austin, TX: Texas Department on Aging, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Texas Department on Aging, *Survey Responses on the Readiness of State Government to Meet the Challenges of an Aging Texas* (Austin, TX: Texas Department on Aging, 2002).