



Facts on Aging

The data below regarding older adults their family caregivers highlight the need for social workers who are prepared with gerontological knowledge, values, and skills.

Demographics

- Today, more than 36.8 million people are age 65 and older in the United States, representing 12.4% of the population.
- Between 2010 and 2030, “Baby Boomers” will enter the over age 65 cohort, resulting in 21% of Americans being over age 65. This represents a 100% increase over 30 years, compared to a 30% growth in the total population.
- Among adults age 65 and older, 5.1 million or about 13%, are age 85 and older. By 2050, about 21 million people will be age 85 and older, representing a 500% increase over 65 years.
- By 2025, 1 in 26 Americans can expect to live to age 100, compared to 1 in 500 in 2000.

Diversity

- 16.5% of the population age 65 and older are persons of color: 8.1% African American, 5.6% Latino, 2.4% Asian and Pacific Islander, and less than 1% Native American.
- The older Latino population is projected to grow more rapidly than any other population.
- One to 3 million Americans age 65 and older are GLBT (or 3-8% of the older adult population), which is projected to double by 2030. Older GLBT adults currently are more likely to live alone, and less likely to be living with life partners and to have children, than their heterosexual counterparts.

Socioeconomic Status

- The poverty rate for older adults is 9.4% compared with 11.3% of those age 18 to age 65. Another 6.2% of older Americans are classified as “near-poor.”
- Rates of poverty are highest among older women and elders of color: 13% of women age 65 and over are poor compared to 7% of men. 25% of older African Americans and 19% of Latinos are poor compared to 7.5% of Caucasians
- For about 20% of older adults, primarily women, Social Security is the only source of income.

Family and Living Situations

- About 66% of older adults live in a family setting in the community– with a partner, child, or sibling – although not necessarily in a multigenerational household.
- Women age 65 and older are three times more likely to be widowed than their male counterparts.

- 65% of older persons with long-term care needs rely exclusively on family and friends to provide assistance. Another 30% supplement family care with some assistance from paid providers.
- About 25% of American families care for someone over the age of 50.
- Of these informal caregivers, about 75% are women who spend as much as 50% more time providing care than their male peers.
- Grandparents as primary caregivers of grandchildren in skipped generation households are the fastest growing household type
- Among children under age 18, 6.3% are living in grandparent headed households. Of these children, approximately 4% are Caucasian, 6.5% Latino, and 13.5% African American
- Only 4.5% of persons age 65 and older live in nursing homes.

Health and Mental Health

- About 20% of older adults have a mild degree of disability in terms of their activities of daily living, but less than 4% are severely disabled.
- Rates of disability are declining or stabilizing, resulting in more years of “active life expectancy” without disabilities
- Despite increased risk of chronic illness and disability, the majority of older adults across racial minority groups rate their health as excellent or very good, even among those with chronic illness and disabilities.
- Perceptions of good health are generally associated with other measures of well-being, especially life satisfaction and social engagement.
- Of low-income elders, 22% report that their health needs go unmet compared to 2.5% of middle and upper income elders.
- Approximately 10% of persons age 65 and older and nearly 50% of those age 85 and older suffer from dementia, primarily Alzheimer’s disease.
- Over two million adults age 65 and older are estimated to have major depression, while another five million suffer from depressive symptoms. Only 15% of elders with depression receive treatment.
- Fewer than 25% of older adults who need mental health services receive treatment. A major barrier to treatment is the shortage of geriatric mental health professionals

Civic Engagement

- The concepts of active aging, resilience and productivity encompass social engagement with and contributions to others as central to quality of life.
- Older adults represent our society’s most underutilized asset, but new civic engagement initiatives, such as voluntarism, voting, and joining community groups, enhance well-being and life satisfaction as well as benefit other generations.
- Older adults are more likely than younger groups to vote in national elections.
- Baby Boomers are redefining voluntarism through environmental activism and intergenerational programs.

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