

## Old Age

Among Americans aged 65 to 69, 49 percent said "these are the best years of my life." Many people in their seventies (44 percent) and eighties (33 percent) agreed. (Among Americans of all ages, 66 percent described the present as their best years.) Sixty percent of older black and 57 percent of older Hispanic respondents said these are their best years. ("[Myths & Realities of Aging Study](#)," NCOA, 2001)

Nearly half of older Americans consider themselves to be middle aged or young. Only 15 percent of those 75 + consider themselves "very old." ("[American Perceptions on Aging in the 21st Century](#)," NCOA, 2002)

- **Vital Aging**

When asked about the keys to a meaningful and vital life, older adults in the study rated having family and friends (88 percent) and taking care of your health (86 percent) as most important, followed by spiritual life (67 percent). At the same time, only 36 percent claimed to be very knowledgeable about things you can do now to prepare for a healthy old age. ("[American Perceptions on Aging in the 21st Century](#)," NCOA, 2002)

- **Intimacy**

About half of all Americans aged 60 and older are sexually active. Among sexually active seniors, most (74 percent of the men and 70 percent of the women) said they were as satisfied or more satisfied with their sex lives, compared to when they were in their 40s. ("[Healthy Sexuality and Vital Aging](#)," NCOA, 1998)

## Caregiving

- **Caregivers and Care Recipients**

Seventy-three percent of caregivers are female and the average age of a caregiver is 46. The average age of a care recipient is 77. Twenty-one percent of caregivers live in the same household as their care recipient, while slightly more than half of care recipients live alone in either a house, apartment or retirement community. Thirty-seven percent of care recipients live with a family member or friend.

([National Alliance for Caregiving](#))

Approximately 7 million caregivers provide or manage care long-distance (living at least an hour away) and together give approximately 15 million days of work annually.

("Caring Across the Miles," NCOA, 1997)

## **Demographics**

- **Size of Older Population**

There were 35.3 million older Americans in 2001, representing 12.4 percent of the population in the United States. There were 4.2 million elderly Americans aged 85 and older, about 1.5 percent of the population.

- **Gender**

In 2000, there were 143 older women for every 100 older men (or 20.6 million older women to 14.4 million older men). The ratio of women to men increases to 245 to 100 for persons age 85 and older.

- **Life Expectancy**

Children born in 2000 have a life expectancy of 76.9 years (73.6 years for men, 79.4 years for women). People reaching the age of 65 in 2000 had an average life expectancy of 17.9 more years. Women reaching age 65 could expect to live

19.2 more years (to age 84) on average, and men could expect to live an additional 16.3 years (to age 81).

Life expectancy projections for the year 2050 vary, but are set at an average age of 80.45 for both sexes. (NIH - National Institute of Aging)

In 1900, life expectancy was 47.3 years; in 1950, it was 68.2 years (all races, both sexes) (National Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 47, No. 13, Dec. 24, 1998).

- **Growth of Older Population**

The population aged 65 and older is projected to double over the next three decades from 35.3 million to nearly 70 million. In 2030, people 65-plus are expected to make up 20 percent of the population. The Census Bureau projects the 65-plus population to be 39.7 million in 2010, 53.7 million in 2020 and 70.3 million in 2030.

The population aged 85 and older is the fastest growing segment of the older population. In 2000, it was estimated that persons 85-plus made up 2 percent of the population, and by 2050, the percentage of this age group is projected to grow to be 5 percent of the population. The 4 million 85-plus population in 2000 will grow to 19 million in 2050.

- **Geographic Distribution**

In 2000, about half of older Americans lived in nine states: California with 3.6 million; Florida (2.8); New York (2.4); Texas (2.1); and Pennsylvania (1.9). Ohio, Illinois, Michigan and New Jersey each had well over one million.

- **Centenarians**

There were 50,545 centenarians in 2000, a 35 percent increase from 1990. This number is expected to further increase to 324,000 by 2030 and to 834,000 in 2050.

- **Marital Status**

In 2000, older men were much more likely to be married than older women-74 percent of men, 43 percent of women. Almost half of all older women in 2000 were widows (45 percent). There were over four times as many widows (8.5 million) as widowers (2 million).

Eight percent of all older persons (2.6 million) in 2000 were divorced or separated. This is a significant increase from 1990, when approximately 1.5 million of the older population were divorced or separated.

## **Economics**

- **Income**

The reported median income in 2000 for persons 65 and older was \$13,769 with an average of \$19,168 in earnings for men and \$10,899 for women. Of the nearly 34 million older persons who reported income, 33.9% reported income of less than \$10,000, and 23.9% reported \$25,000 or more. The major sources of income as reported by the Social Security Administration for the 65-plus population were Social Security (38% of aggregate income), earnings (21%), income from assets (20%), and public/private pensions (19%). (Bureau of Labor Statistics)

- **Employment**

Unless otherwise noted, the figures in this section are from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In 2001, 4.2 million (12.8%) older Americans made up three

percent of the labor force (working or actively seeking work), including 2.4 million men (17.5%) and 1.8 million women (9.4%). (Bureau of Labor Statistics)

The majority of mature workers (those over 55)--more than 70% in 2001--are employed full time and are doing so by choice. However, many more mature workers can be found in alternative work arrangements: such as independent contractors or temporary assignments. More older men (65 +) are in alternative or nontraditional work arrangements than women. (Bureau of Labor Statistics)

The average unemployment rate for mature workers was 3 percent in 2001, up from 2.6 percent in 2000. It typically takes those 55 and over some 18 weeks to find a job versus an average of 12.7 weeks for those under age 55.

Age discrimination continues to be a problem for mature workers. There were more than 14,100 "age charges" filed with the EEOC in 1999, but that number increased to over 16,000 in 2001. ([EEOC](#))

The majority of older persons (58 percent) consider themselves completely retired, while 23 percent say they are retired and working, and 19 percent are not retired. A larger number of those over 75 say they are completely retired (86 percent). ("[American Perceptions of Aging in the 21st Century](#)," NCOA, 2002).

- **Poverty**

About 3.4 million older Americans (10.2%) were below the poverty level in 2000. Percentages of older people living below the poverty level included 8.9% of elderly Whites, 22.3% of elderly African-Americans and 18.8% of elderly Hispanics.

Poverty rates for the 65-plus population which were higher than the average percentage were found among those who lived in central cities (12.4%), rural areas (13.2%) and in the South (12.7%). Older women reported a higher poverty rate (12.2%) than older men (7.5%) in 2000.

Older persons living alone or with non-relatives were much more likely to be poor (20.8%) than were older persons living with families (5.1%). Older Hispanic women who lived alone or with non-relatives experienced the highest poverty rates of 38.3 percent.

- **Housing and Living Arrangements**

Most people aged 65-plus live with family members with over half (55%) of non-institutionalized persons living with their spouse. In 2000, approximately 10.1 million or 73% of older men, and 7.7 million or 41% of older women, lived with their spouse.

The proportion living alone increased with age, and this is especially true for women. Among women aged 75 and over, half (49.4%) lived alone. Only 28.8 percent of women who were older than 75 lived with a spouse. There were 9.7 million (30%) older persons living alone in 2000, with 7.4 million being women and 2.4 million being men. They represented 40% of older women and 17% of older men.

Only 1.56 million (4.5%) of the 65-plus population lived in nursing homes in 2000. While this number is relatively small, the percentage rises steeply with age (1.1 percent for persons 65-74, 4.7 percent for persons 75-84 and 18.2 percent for persons 85 and older).

## **Computers & Web Access**

- About 5.5 million households or 24.3 percent of the total where householders were 65 + had a computer. About 18 percent had Internet access.

The following information is from a 2001 "Senior Wired" survey by AOL Time Warner, Inc. and E-Marketer.com, Inc.

- The Internet is becoming a more important and frequent part of older Americans' daily lives. Forty-one of the respondents said they had been online for one to three years, and 48 percent have been online more than four years. The survey reported that 15 percent of people 65 and older use the Web, as compared to 56 percent for the entire population.
- Between 64 and 69 percent of wired seniors use the Internet on a typical day. Older Americans in the top ten "wired" cities are spending an average of 20 hours per week online. Slightly more than half go online to browse for fun, read the news, and search for information related to hobbies and health. Fifty-eight percent of seniors search for medical information online. Seniors who use the Web are more likely to spend more time and money on the Web. In 1999, seniors accounted for 21 percent of total e-commerce spending in the U.S.
- Older males use the Web much more frequently than older females, 60 percent versus 40. Older Americans who use the Internet are generally more educated, more likely to be married and earn higher retirement incomes than their peers who are not online. ([Senior Living, About.com](#))