

## Senior Snapshot: Older Alaskans in 2010

Older Alaskans are a highly diverse group of individuals. While statistics about our senior population do not capture the unique circumstances of all the seniors we know, information about the collective lives of Alaska's seniors illustrates many of the issues of concern to older Alaskans and their advocates.

The Alaska Commission on Aging has gathered a selection of data on older Alaskans in order to provide a sketch of the older residents of our state and their well-being. In our **Senior Snapshot: Older Alaskans in 2010**, we offer a number of data points, which corroborate the following observations:

- ◆ The number of seniors in Alaska is increasing rapidly – by nearly seven percent in the most recent year alone. While senior populations in several regions have grown especially rapidly in the past eight years (for example, the Southcentral region's seniors have increased by nearly 72%), all nine regions have witnessed an increase in their senior populations of at least 20% during this time period.
- ◆ Older baby boomers are swelling the ranks of the youngest group of seniors, now the fastest-growing age group. Growing almost as fast is the 85-and-older group, whose members are the most frail, the most likely to struggle with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD), and the most likely to depend on home- and community-based care as well as institutional long-term support services.
- ◆ Retired seniors as a whole contribute at least \$1.7 billion annually to Alaska's economy, including their retirement income and health care spending. While Alaska's "retirement industry" may not yet be competing with those of Florida or Arizona, this source of cash flow is in fact one of the state's top economic sectors. And its value is enhanced by the fact that it produces local spending and is environmentally benign, stable, year-round, compatible with other industries, spread throughout the state, and helps create economies of scale (particularly in health care) which benefit the entire population.
- ◆ Many Alaska seniors are struggling to get by financially. Nearly 20 percent of Alaskans age 65 and older are receiving a modest monthly cash supplement from the Senior Benefits Program, a percentage which varies greatly by location, from 10.7 percent in the North Slope region to 57.4 percent in the Bethel/Wade Hampton region. To qualify for this program, seniors must have incomes below 175% of the federal poverty level for Alaska. In 2010, that meant no more than \$23,678 for a single senior, and no more than \$31,868 for a couple. In the Alaska Commission on Aging's 2010 Survey of Older Alaskans, 20% reported that their monthly income is not enough to pay for necessities, while another 39% said they are able to afford the necessities but have little money left for any extras.
- ◆ Alaskan seniors are more likely than U.S. seniors as a whole to die of causes linked to behavioral health issues. Older Alaskans have suicide rates 45% higher than national senior suicide rates, as well as high rates of accidental deaths and alcohol- and drug-induced deaths. These figures suggest that behavioral health programs targeted to seniors with depression, other mental illness, and substance abuse problems could have a dramatic impact on our seniors' quality of life.

- ◆ In spite of these areas of unfavorable comparison, Alaska's seniors are actually healthier than the national average – less likely to die from most of the leading causes of death except for cancer and chronic lower respiratory disease, and less likely to die in a given year from *all* causes of death. Alaskan seniors' age-adjusted death rates are substantially lower than those of U.S. seniors as a whole. For every 100,000 Alaskans age 65 and older, only 3,812 die in a given one-year period, while for every 100,000 U.S. seniors, 4,636 die during that period. In other words, an Alaskan senior is 18 percent less likely to die (from any cause) during a given year than his or her U.S. counterpart.
- ◆ Older Alaskans themselves perceive their health as better. They are 23% less likely than U.S. seniors to describe their overall health as "fair" or "poor," according to the BRFSS (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, a national Public Health phone survey).
- ◆ However, Alaskan seniors report higher levels of self-described disability than do U.S. seniors as a whole. The BRFSS asks whether they are "limited in their activities because of physical, mental, or emotional problems." Alaskan seniors are 25 percent more likely to answer, "Yes." Alaskan seniors are also 29% more likely to be obese.
- ◆ Today's Pioneer Home residents are more likely than not to require care at Level III, the most advanced level of care, which includes 24-hour nursing care. This presents the Pioneer Homes with a challenge because it is a very different mix of residents from that which the homes were originally designed to serve. However, one reason for this more intensive level of need is that older Alaskans are able to remain in their own homes longer today thanks to more comprehensive home- and community-based services. The average Pioneer Home resident today is nearly a decade older than the average resident in 1998.
- ◆ A steadily increasing number of complaints about abuse and neglect involving seniors are being received by agencies such as Adult Protective Services and the Long-Term Care Ombudsman's Office. Cases of abuse, neglect and exploitation of seniors may involve friends and family members, paid caregivers, telemarketers, and others. Reports to Adult Protective Services increased by 13.5% in the last year, while complaints to the Long-Term Care Ombudsman's Office increased by 24%.
- ◆ As the senior population grows, demand for affordable, accessible senior housing units is accelerating. The waiting list for AHFC's senior/disabled housing has grown by 70% in the past two years. Meanwhile, 15-16% of Alaska's homeless population is estimated to be people age 55 and older.
- ◆ Over 6,000 Alaskans age 65 and older may be in some stage of Alzheimer's disease, based on national prevalence rates.
- ◆ Falls comprise over three-quarters of Alaska seniors' non-fatal injury hospitalizations. Alcohol use is a suspected factor in nearly one in twelve senior falls.

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Population Age 60+	2009	% of Area's 2008 Pop.	Seniors Change 2001-2009	Comments
<i>Statewide Total</i>	85,100	12.3%	+52.6%	All census areas. 6.6% increase over 2008. <b>NOTE 1</b>
I. Bethel Area	2,131	8.6%	+20.7%	Bethel, Wade Hampton
II. Interior	11,874	10.9%	+54.6%	Fairbanks NSB, Yukon-Koyukuk, Denali, SE Fbks
III. North Slope	600	8.8%	+24.0%	North Slope Borough
IV. Anchorage	33,913	11.7%	+51.7%	Municipality of Anchorage
V. Southcentral	20,841	14.2%	+71.9%	Kenai Peninsula, Mat-Su, Valdez-Cordova
VI. Aleutians	511	7.0%	+37.0%	Aleutians East, Aleutians West
VII. Southwest	2,359	11.2%	+39.7%	Bristol Bay, Dillingham, Kodiak, Lake & Peninsula
VIII. Northwest	1,600	9.5%	+22.2%	Nome, Northwest Arctic
IX. Southeast	11,271	16.3%	+41.2%	Haines, Juneau, Ketchikan, Prince of Wales, Sitka, Skagway-Hoonah-Angoon, Wrangell-Petersburg, Yakutat
		<b>% of AK Seniors:</b>		
Age 60-64	32,837	38.6%	+76.0%	Older baby boomers entering this group. <b>NOTE 2</b>
Age 65-74	33,081	38.9%	+43.1%	
Age 75-84	14,169	16.6%	+27.5%	
Age 85+	5,013	5.9%	+74.4%	
Rank Among States in growth of senior population	Ranking: #1	AK Growth, 1998-2008: 49.8%	U.S. Avg. Growth: 13.0%	Age 65+. <b>NOTE 3</b>

Economic Status			Comments
Seniors' Economic Contribution to Alaska	2004: \$1.461 billion*	2009: \$1.682 billion**	*ISER figure from "Report on the Economic Well-Being of Alaska Seniors" (2007) **2010 ACOA estimate. <b>NOTE 4</b>
Percent Low-Income (Age 65+)	Alaska, 2009:	U.S., 2009:	2010 Current Population Survey/American Social and Economic Supplement
Below 200% FPL	28.8%* (Rank: #43)	33.7%	Census Bureau; not adjusted for higher living costs in Alaska (FPL = Federal Poverty Level) *Unreliable statistic due to small sample size
Average Monthly Social Security Pmt, Age 65+	AK, Dec. 2009: \$1,111	U.S., Dec. 2009: \$1,164	A total of 47,821 Alaskans age 65+ received Social Security benefits (91.5%). Social Security Administration. <b>NOTE 5</b>
Average Monthly PERS Pmt	\$1,485.47	# of seniors: 11,453	AK Dept. of Administration, Div. of Retirement & Benefits. Public Employees Retirement System. <b>NOTE 6</b>
Average Monthly TRS Pmt	\$2,653.61	# of seniors: 4,318	AK Dept. of Administration, Div. of Retirement & Benefits. Teachers Retirement System. <b>NOTE 7</b>
# of Senior Benefits Recipients	Nov. 2010:	% of Seniors Age 65+:	Alaska Division of Public Assistance. <b>NOTE 8</b>
<i>Statewide</i>	10,109	19.3%	1.2% increase over Nov. 2009 statewide total
I. Bethel Area	812	57.4%	0% change from Nov. 2009 region total
II. Interior	1,214	17.0%	1.2% increase over Nov. 2009 region total
III. North Slope	38	10.7%	15.6% decrease from Nov. 2009 region total
IV. Anchorage	3,642	17.7%	2.0% increase over Nov. 2009 region total
V. Southcentral	2,353	18.0%	0.4% decrease from Nov. 2009 region total
VI. Aleutians	35	16.3%	10.3% decrease from Nov. 2009 region total
VII. Southwest	421	28.8%	0.2% decrease from Nov. 2009 region total
VIII. Northwest	401	39.4%	2.9% decrease from Nov. 2009 region total
IX. Southeast	1,188	17.0%	6.1% increase over Nov. 2009 region total

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Seniors (age 60+) who say they can't afford the necessities	2010: 20%	2005: 21%	Alaska Commission on Aging mail-back surveys of older Alaskans – 2010 and 2005
Seniors (age 60+) on Food Stamps	Nov. 2010: 4,557 (60+)	Nov. 2010: 2,624 (65+)	Alaska Division of Public Assistance; senior (age 60+) Food Stamp recipients up 18% since November 2009
Avg. Mo. Benefit (Food Stamps)	\$155.90 (Age 60-64)	\$96.21 (Age 65+)	Alaska Division of Public Assistance. <b>NOTE 9</b>
Seniors Receiving Old Age Assistance (Adult Public Assistance)	November 2010: number of AK seniors: 4,485 (24.8% of all APA)	November 2010: average amount of Old Age Assistance monthly benefit: \$290	Alaska Division of Public Assistance. <b>NOTE 10</b>
Senior Medicaid Eligibles	Nov. 2010: 10,023	% of Senior Pop.: 11.8%	Alaska Division of Public Assistance; includes those age 60+ on November Medicaid rolls
Percentage of homeless people age 55+	2009/2010: 15% - Anchorage; 15.8% other communities	2008: 17%	AHFC. Based on an annual HUD single-point-in-time survey.
AHFC total units of senior/disabled housing (statewide)	Dec. 2010: 610 units		AHFC. Includes only units owned/managed by AHFC.
AHFC wait list for senior/disabled housing (statewide)	Dec. 2010: 1,281	Jan. 2009: 754	AHFC. Includes individuals age 62+ as well as individuals of any age with a disability.
AHFC wait list for housing vouchers	Dec. 2010: 7,104 families		AHFC. Includes all families, regardless of age.
AHFC senior housing units funded for development	2010: 30 units	2001 thru 2009: 533 units	AHFC. Includes funding provided to various developers.

Senior Health	Alaska	U.S.	Comments
# with ADRD (estimate)	2009: 6,008	5,300,000	AK estimate based on national prevalence rates by age group. <b>NOTE 11</b>
Age-adjusted death rate (per 100,000 seniors 65+)	2009: 3,811.5	2007: 4,636.1	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. <b>NOTE 12</b>
Suicide rate (per 100,000 seniors age 65+)	2005-2009: 20.7	2007: 14.3	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. <b>NOTE 13</b>
Fatal fall rate (accidental)	2005-2009: 25.7	2007: 48.4	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. <b>NOTE 14</b>
Other accidental deaths (per 100,000 age 65+)	2005-2009: 76.7	2007: 52.7	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. <b>NOTE 15</b>
Alcohol-induced deaths	2005-2009: 38.8	2007: 11.9	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. <b>NOTE 16</b>
Drug-induced deaths	2005-2009: 8.0	2007: 4.4	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. <b>NOTE 17</b>
Leading causes of death:	2009 (AK):	2007 (U.S.):	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. <b>NOTE 18</b>
Cancer	1,046.6	1,029.2	Per 100,000 age 65+
Heart diseases	834.2	1,310.1	Per 100,000 age 65+
Stroke	239.2	306.2	Per 100,000 age 65+
Chronic lower respiratory diseases	319.5	289.3	Per 100,000 age 65+
Alzheimer's disease	126.3	192.6	Per 100,000 age 65+
Diabetes mellitus	99.5	136.1	Per 100,000 age 65+
Unintentional injuries	105.2	101.1	Per 100,000 age 65+

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Hospital admissions for all non-fatal injuries, age 60+	AK, 2008: 971	U.S., 2009: 754,905	Alaska Trauma Registry; WISQARS data base (CDC) – for U.S., total reflects top 20 causes of injury
Alcohol use suspected	96 (9.9%)		Alaska Trauma Registry
Hospital admissions for non-fatal falls, age 60+	744 (76.6% of all non-fatal injury hospitalizations)	565,029 (74.8% of non-fatal injury hospitalizations from top 20 causes)	Alaska Trauma Registry; WISQARS data base (CDC)
Alcohol use suspected	61 (8.2%)		Alaska Trauma Registry
Binge drinkers	5.1%	3.5%	Age 65+ - 2009 BRFSS. <b>NOTE 19</b>
Heavy drinkers	4.1%	3.1%	Age 65+ - 2009 BRFSS. <b>NOTE 20</b>
Smokers	8.6%	8.2%	Age 65+ - 2009 BRFSS. <b>NOTE 21</b>
Disabled seniors	38.3%	30.6%	Age 65+ who are “limited in activities because of physical, mental or emotional problems” – 2009 BRFSS. <b>NOTE 22</b>
Obese seniors	31.2%	24.1%	Age 65+ - 2009 BRFSS. <b>NOTE 23</b>
Seniors with diabetes	18.3%	19.0%	Age 65+ - 2009 BRFSS.
Seniors whose general health is “Fair” or “Poor”	19.1%	24.7%	Age 65+ - 2009 BRFSS.
Seniors reporting difficulty finding a primary care doctor	2010: Medicare issue: 19% Other issue: 10%		Alaska Commission on Aging mail-back survey of older Alaskans, 2010
Pioneer Home residents at Level III	12/31/2010: 50.8%	12/31/2004: 46.1%	Data provided by Div. of Pioneer Homes. Level III is the most advanced level of care.
Avg. age of PH resident	Dec. 1, 2010: 85.6 years	1998: 76 years	Data provided by Div. of Pioneer Homes.
Nursing home costs – private room, average daily rate	AK, 2010: \$687*	U.S., 2010: \$229	*AK: highest cost in the U.S.; MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2010 Market Survey of Long-Term Care Costs
Assisted Living Home costs – average monthly base rate	AK, 2010: \$4,372*	U.S., 2010: \$3,293	*AK: 3 <sup>rd</sup> highest cost in the U.S. (CT & MA are higher); MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2010 Market Survey of Long-Term Care Costs
Older Alaskans Medicaid waiver recipients	FY 2010: 1,721	FY 2009: 1,668	FY 09 info from Senior & Disability Services. FY 10 info from DHSS FY 2012 Budget Overview. <b>NOTE 24</b>
Senior grants clients	FY 2010: 21,261	FY 2009: 15,352	FY09 info from Senior & Disability Services. FY10 info from DHSS FY 2012 Budget Overview <b>NOTE 25</b>
<b>Senior Safety</b>			
Long-Term Care Ombudsman complaints	FY 2010: 486	FY 2009: 391	Comments Complaints involving seniors (age 60+) in long-term care. Data from the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman
Adult Protective Services reports	FY 2010: 3,119	FY 2009: 2,748	Adult Protective Services (APS), Senior & Disabilities Services.

## NOTES:

1. Data from Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development's 2009 population estimates. Regions are those used by the Alaska Department of Health & Social Services. "The Alaska State Plan for Senior Services, FY 2008 – FY 2011" prescribes funding by region for those grant programs which include federal Older Americans Act money.
2. Data from Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development's 2009 population estimates. Percent of area population column shows percent of statewide population in each age group.
3. Data from "A Profile of Older Americans: 2009," Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The five states with the fastest-growing senior populations during the decade from 1998 through 2008 were Alaska (49.8%), Nevada (48.1%), Arizona (39.7%), Utah (33.7%), and New Mexico (31.3%). Rhode Island and Washington, DC saw a decline in senior population during this decade. Alaska's gains reflect the aging of those who moved to state during the oil boom of the 1970s and early 1980s, and the choices of more and more seniors to remain in the state after retirement.
4. The University of Alaska Anchorage's Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) estimated the 2004 cash contribution of Alaska retirees age 60 and older at \$1.461 billion. The estimate is contained in the 2007 ACOA-commissioned "Report on the Economic Well-Being of Alaska Seniors," available on the Commission's website at: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/acoa/documents/seniorWellbeingReport.pdf> . The Commission estimated seniors' 2010 contributions by applying the increases in the Anchorage Consumer Price Index for 2005 (3.1%), 2006 (3.2%), 2007 (2.2%), 2008 (4.6%), and 2009 (1.2%), to the 2004 base figure.
5. Data obtained from Social Security Administration's website. Alaska average includes all Alaska residents age 65 and older who receive Social Security retirement benefits, a total of 47,821 people. U.S. average includes all U.S. residents age 65 and older who receive Social Security retirement benefits. The Alaska average monthly payment may be lower because of the high percentage of Alaska retirees who are subject to the "Windfall Elimination Provision," which limits Social Security retirement benefits to many individuals receiving public employee pensions.
6. Figures on PERS (Public Employee Retirement System) benefits include PERS retirees age 60 and older who currently reside in Alaska.
7. Figures on TRS (Teachers Retirement System) benefits include TRS retirees age 60 and older who currently reside in Alaska.
8. Alaskans age 65 and older with incomes up to 175% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for Alaska are eligible for the Senior Benefits Program. For 2010, 175% of the Alaska FPL was \$23,678 for a single senior and \$31,868 for a couple.
9. Seniors age 65 and older often have higher incomes than those in the 60 - 64 age group because they are receiving Social Security retirement benefits or other benefits that begin at age 65. Hence the lower average monthly Food Stamps value for the 65+ population.
10. Adult Public Assistance is a supplement to SSI, so recipients must be either certified as disabled by the Social Security Administration (with severe long-term disabilities that impose mental or physical limitations on their day-to-day functioning) or be age 65 and older. There are income limits for the program, which is intended to assist aged or disabled individuals in attaining self-support or self-care.
11. ADRD: Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Alaska ADRD population was estimated by the Alaska Commission on Aging based on national (per Dr. Denis Evans, 1990) prevalence rates of three percent for those age 65 to 74, 18.7 percent for those age 75 to 84, and 47.2 percent for those age 85 and older. National estimate is for 2009, from the Alzheimer's Association's "2009 Alzheimer's Facts and Figures." "The dramatic rise in Alzheimer's underscores that the disease has the ability to undermine the entire U.S. health care system," according to Stephen McConnell, Ph.D., the vice president of advocacy and public policy for the Alzheimer's Association.

12. The age-adjusted death rate shows how many people out of every 100,000 in a particular age group died during a given time period. For states like Alaska with fewer than 100,000 people in the 65-and-older age group, adjustments are made to produce a comparable figure. This statistic tells us that Alaskans age 65 and older were substantially less likely to die from any cause than U.S. seniors as a whole.
13. Alaska's senior suicide rate is 45% higher than that of U.S. seniors as a whole.
14. Fatal falls among seniors are actually 47% lower in Alaska than in the U.S. as a whole. The reason for this is unclear.
15. Alaska's "Other Accidental Deaths" (excluding fatal falls) are 46% higher for seniors here compared with the U.S. as a whole.
16. Alaska seniors are over three times more likely than U.S. seniors as a whole to experience an alcohol-induced death.
17. Drug-induced deaths (including both prescription and non-prescription drugs) are 82% higher among Alaska seniors than among U.S. seniors.
18. Alaska seniors are more likely to die from cancer and chronic lower respiratory diseases than the national average, but less likely to die from other leading causes. Death rates from heart disease are substantially lower in Alaska.
19. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an ongoing multi-state phone survey conducted in Alaska by the Division of Public Health. Binge drinking is defined as males having five or more drinks on one occasion or females having four or more drinks on one occasion.
20. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an ongoing multi-state phone survey conducted in Alaska by the Division of Public Health. Heavy drinking is defined as adult men having more than two drinks per day or adult women having more than one drink per day.
21. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an ongoing multi-state phone survey conducted in Alaska by the Division of Public Health. Smokers are defined as current smokers.
22. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an ongoing multi-state phone survey conducted in Alaska by the Division of Public Health. Seniors with disabilities include those age 65 and over who say that they are limited in their activities because of physical, mental, or emotional problems.
23. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an ongoing multi-state phone survey conducted in Alaska by the Division of Public Health. "Obese" individuals are defined as those with a body mass index (BMI) of 30.0 or greater.
24. To qualify for services under the Older Alaskans Medicaid Waiver program, individuals must be age 65 or older, income-eligible for Medicaid, and must meet nursing home level-of-care requirements. Waiver services are home- and community-based services (such as meal programs, chore assistance, and care coordination) that allow the individual to continue living in his or her own home.
25. Senior grant programs include Nutrition, Transportation and Support Services (NTS), Senior In-Home Services, Adult Day Services, Family Caregiver, and ADRD Education and Support. The senior grant programs are available to individuals age 60 and older. They need not be Medicaid-eligible in order to receive grant services.