

Senior Snapshot: Older Alaskans in 2008

Older Alaskans are a highly diverse group of individuals, living a great variety of lifestyles in communities large and small. Statistics about our senior population do not capture the unique personalities and circumstances of all the seniors we know. Nevertheless, information about some aspects of 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 2008**, we offer a number of data points, which corroborate the following observations:

- ◆ Alaska now has the fastest-growing senior population of the 50 states, with an increase of almost 50% among individuals age 65 and older during the past ten years.
- ◆ While senior populations in several regions have grown especially rapidly in the past six years (for example, the Southcentral region's seniors have increased by almost 50%), all nine regions have witnessed a double-digit percentage increase in their senior populations during this time period.
- ◆ Baby boomers are already beginning to swell the ranks of the youngest group of seniors, but the fastest-growing age group within the senior population 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 as well as institutional long-term support services.
- ◆ While Alaska seniors appear no more likely to be living in poverty than the national average among seniors, many of them 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 12 percent in the North Slope region to 59 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 2008, that meant no more than \$22,750 for a single senior, and no more than \$30,625 for a couple.
- ◆ Retired seniors as a whole contribute approximately \$1.6 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 industries. 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.
- ◆ Wait lists for AHFC senior housing have grown by over 70 percent in six years. As the senior population grows by six percent per year, we can expect more and more older Alaskans to seek out the senior housing provided by AHFC.
- ◆ Alaskan seniors are more likely than U.S. seniors as a whole to die of causes linked to behavioral health issues. Older Alaskans have high suicide rates as well as high rates of accidental deaths and alcohol-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 any of the leading causes of death and less likely to die in a given year from *any* cause 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 4,036 die in a given one-year period, while for every 100,000 U.S. seniors, 4,865 die during that period. In other words, an Alaskan senior is 20 percent less likely to die (from any cause) during a given year than his or her U.S. counterpart.
- ◆ Alaskan seniors report higher levels of self-described disability than do U.S. seniors as a whole. The BRFSS (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, a Public Health phone survey) asks whether they are "limited in their activities because of physical, mental, or emotional problems." Alaskan seniors are about 15 percent more likely to answer, "Yes."
- ◆ 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 ten years older than the average resident of a decade ago.
- ◆ A substantial number of complaints about abuse and neglect involving seniors in long-term support services, as well as cases of financial exploitation of seniors, are being received by agencies such as the Long-Term Care Ombudsman's Office and the Office of Elder Fraud and Assistance. (Data on those served by Adult Protective Services was not available, but the number is known to be increasing as well.) Many cases of abuse, neglect and exploitation of seniors involve friends and family members.
- ◆ Alaska's correctional facilities admit senior inmates on a regular basis, and house others who have aged into their senior years while incarcerated. These individuals may need services during their time in prison as well as upon their release.

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Population Age 60+	2007	% of Area's Total 2007 Pop.	Seniors Change Since 2001	Comments
<i>Statewide Total</i>	76,348	11.3%	+36.9%	<i>All census areas. NOTE 1</i>
I. Bethel Area	2,040	8.4%	+15.4%	Bethel, Wade Hampton
II. Interior	10,609	10.1%	+38.1%	Fairbanks NSB, Yukon-Koyukuk, Denali, SE Fbks
III. North Slope	567	8.4%	+17.1%	North Slope Borough
IV. Anchorage	30,637	10.8%	+37.1%	Municipality of Anchorage
V. Southcentral	18,078	12.7%	+49.1%	Kenai Peninsula, Mat-Su, Valdez-Cordova
VI. Aleutians	455	6.2%	+22.0%	Aleutians East, Aleutians West
VII. Southwest	2,180	10.4%	+29.1%	Bristol Bay, Dillingham, Kodiak, Lake & Peninsula
VIII. Northwest	1,546	9.1%	+18.2%	Nome, Northwest Arctic
IX. Southeast	10,236	14.8%	+28.2%	Haines, Juneau, Ketchikan, Prince of Wales, Sitka, Skagway-Hoonah-Angoon, Wrangell-Petersburg, Yakutat
Age 60-64	28,853	4.3%	+54.7%	Older baby boomers entering this group. NOTE 2
Age 65-74	29,261	4.3%	+26.6%	
Age 75-84	13,711	2.0%	+23.3%	
Age 85+	4,523	0.7%	+57.3%	Fastest-growing age group
Rank Among States in Growth of Senior Population	Ranking: #1	AK Growth, 1997-2007: 49.6%	U.S. Avg. Growth: 11.2%	Age 65+. NOTE 3

Economic Status			Comments
Seniors' Economic Contribution to Alaska	2004: \$1.461 billion*	2008: \$1.589 billion**	*ISER figure from "Report on the Economic Well-Being of Alaska Seniors" (2007) **2008 ACOA estimate. NOTE 4
Percent in Poverty	2000: Alaska	2000: U.S.	Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development
Below 100% Pov.	7%	10%	Not adjusted for higher living costs in AK; 2000 Census
Below 200% Pov.	24%	36%	Not adjusted for higher living costs in AK; 2000 Census
Average Monthly Social Security Pmt	AK, Dec. 2007: \$1,015	U.S. Dec. 2007: \$1,049	Social Security Administration. NOTE 5
Average Monthly PERS Pmt	\$1,433.57	# of seniors: 10,042	AK Dept. of Administration, Div. of Retirement & Benefits. NOTE 6
# of Senior Benefits Recipients	Nov. 2008:	% of Seniors Age 65+:	Alaska Division of Public Assistance. NOTE 7
<i>Statewide</i>	9,309	19.6%	<i>All census areas</i>
I. Bethel Area	807	59.4%	Bethel, Wade Hampton
II. Interior	1,109	17.2%	Fairbanks NSB, Yukon-Koyukuk, Denali, SE Fbks
III. North Slope	41	11.7%	North Slope Borough
IV. Anchorage	3,353	17.7%	Municipality of Anchorage
V. Southcentral	2,153	19.1%	Kenai Peninsula, Mat-Su, Valdez-Cordova
VI. Aleutians	32	16.6%	Aleutians East, Aleutians West
VII. Southwest	387	28.8%	Bristol Bay, Dillingham, Kodiak, Lake & Peninsula
VIII. Northwest	391	38.3%	Nome, Northwest Arctic
IX. Southeast	1,030	15.8%	Haines, Juneau, Ketchikan, Prince of Wales, Sitka, Skagway-Hoonah-Angoon, Wrangell-Petersburg, Yakutat
Seniors (Age 65+) Receiving Old Age Assistance (Adult Public Assistance)	Nov. 2008 number of AK senior households: 4,979 (29.5% of all APA)	Nov. 2008 average amount of APA monthly benefit, all recipients: \$276	Alaska Division of Public Assistance. NOTE 8
Seniors (Age 60+) on Food Stamps	Nov. 2008: 3,160 (60+)	Nov. 2008: 1,853 (65+)	Alaska Division of Public Assistance

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Avg. Monthly \$\$ (Food Stamps)	\$107.24 (Age 60+)	\$85.24 (Age 65+)	Alaska Division of Public Assistance. NOTE 9
% Homeless Age 55+	2008: 17%	total of 123 seniors**	Based on a single-point-in-time statewide survey by AHFC, 2008; **Some people declined to give their age
AHFC wait list for senior/disabled housing (statewide)	Jan. 2009: 754	Jan. 2003: 440	AHFC. Includes individuals age 62+ as well as individuals of any age with a disability

Senior Health	Alaska	U.S.	Comments
# with ADRD (estimate)	2007: 5,090	5,000,000	Based on national prevalence rates by age group. NOTE 10
Age-adjusted death rate (per 100,000 seniors)	2006: 4,036.1	2005: 4,865.6	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. NOTE 11
Suicide rate (per 100,000 seniors age 65+)	2002-2006: 20.1	2005: 14.7	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. NOTE 12
Other accidental deaths (per 100,000 age 65+)	2002-2006: 89.4	2005: 57.1	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. "Other accidental deaths" exclude fatal falls. NOTE 13
Alcohol-induced deaths	2002-2006: 38.2	2005: 11.6	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. NOTE 14
Non-fatal falls (per 100,000 age 65+)	2005: 1,369	2005: 1,176	Alaska Div. of Public Health – Alaska Trauma Registry; US Centers for Disease Control. NOTE 15
Binge drinkers	3.6%	3.5%	Age 65+ - 2007 BRFSS. NOTE 16
Heavy drinkers	2.3%	2.9%	Age 65+ - 2007 BRFSS. NOTE 17
Smokers	11.5%	9.0%	Age 65+ - 2007 BRFSS. NOTE 18
Disabled seniors	36.2%	31.5%	Age 65+ who are "limited in activities because of physical, mental or emotional problems" – 2007 BRFSS
Pioneer Home residents at Level III	10/31/08: 57.6%		Data provided by Div. of Pioneer Homes. Level III is the most advanced level of care
Avg. age of PH resident at time of admission	2008: 86 years	1998: 76 years	Data provided by Div. of Pioneer Homes
Leading causes of death:	2006 (AK):	2005 (U.S.):	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. NOTE 19
Cancer	1,004.6	1,056.4	Per 100,000 age 65+
Heart diseases	965.1	1,445.2	Per 100,000 age 65+
Stroke	274.8	337.1	Per 100,000 age 65+
Chronic lower respiratory diseases	235.2	306.5	Per 100,000 age 65+
Alzheimer's disease	158.3	192.6	Per 100,000 age 65+
Diabetes mellitus	142.9	150.3	Per 100,000 age 65+
Older Alaskans Medicaid waiver recipients	FY 2008: 1,288		Info from Senior & Disability Services. NOTE 20
Senior grants clients	FY 2008: 11,865		Info from Senior & Disability Services. NTS Program only. NOTE 21

Senior Safety			Comments
Long-Term Care Ombudsman complaints	FY 2008: 264		Complaints involving seniors (age 60+) in long-term care. Data from the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman
Office of Elder Fraud cases	464		Cases investigated in Office's first two years. Data from Office of Elder Fraud and Assistance (Office of Public Advocacy). NOTE 22
Assets recovered	\$1,000,000		
Assets currently being pursued	\$4,000,000		Office of Elder Fraud reports that the majority of cases involve exploitation by friends and family
Corrections intakes of seniors	2008: 787		Intakes of seniors (age 60+) to correctional facilities any time during 2008; info from AK Dept. of Corrections
Senior offenders in AK prisons	2008: 148		As of Dec. 31, 2008, per AK Dept. of Corrections; 141 are male, 7 female; 133 on felony offenses, 15 misdemeanors

NOTES:

1. Data from Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development's 2007 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 2007 population estimates. Percent of area population column shows percent of statewide population in each age group.
3. Data from "A Profile of Older Americans: 2008," Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The five states with the fastest-growing senior populations during the decade from 1997 through 2007 were Alaska (49.6%), Nevada (48.3%), Arizona (36.2%), Utah (30.0%), and New Mexico (29.7%). Several states lost senior population during this time, including Rhode Island, which saw a 5.9% decline. Alaska's gains reflect 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' 2008 contributions by applying the increases in the Anchorage Consumer Price Index for 2005 (3.1%), 2006 (3.2%), and 2007 (2.2%) to the 2004 base figure.
5. Data obtained from Social Security Administration's Juneau office. Alaska average includes all Alaska residents age 65 and older who receive Social Security retirement benefits, a total of 43,570 people. U.S. average includes all U.S. residents age 65 and older who receive Social Security retirement benefits. The Alaska average 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. 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 2008, 175% of the Alaska FPL was \$22,750 for a single senior and \$30,625 for a couple.
8. 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.
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. Hence the lower average monthly Food Stamps value for the 65+ population.
10. ADRD: Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Alaska ADRD population was estimated by the Alaska Commission on Aging based on national (Alzheimer's Association) prevalence rates of two percent for those age 65 to 74, 19 percent for those age 75 to 84, and 42 percent for those age 85 and older. National estimate is also for 2007, from the Alzheimer's Association's "2007 Alzheimer's Facts and Figures." According to the Alzheimer's Association, the national estimate reflects a ten percent increase in just five years. "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.
11. 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.

12. Alaska's senior suicide rate is 37% higher than that of U.S. seniors as a whole.
13. Alaska's "Other Accidental Deaths" (excluding fatal falls) are 57% higher for seniors here compared with the U.S. as a whole.
14. Alaska seniors are more than three times as likely as U.S. seniors as a whole to experience an alcohol-induced death.
15. Includes non-fatal fall injuries where individual was hospitalized for 24 hours or more.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. Note that Alaska seniors are less likely to die from any of the six leading causes of death. Death rates from cancer or diabetes mellitus are slightly lower. Death rates from stroke, chronic lower respiratory disease, and Alzheimer's disease are moderately lower. And death rates from heart disease are substantially lower in Alaska.
20. To qualify for services under the Older Alaskans Medicaid Waiver program, individuals must be age 65 or older, income-eligible for Medicaid long-term care (income cut-off amounts are currently frozen in statute, so that fewer people are likely to qualify each year), 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.
21. The NTS (Nutrition, Transportation, and Support Services) Program is one of five senior grant programs. It is the largest program, incorporating such services as congregate meals, home-delivered meals, assisted transportation, unassisted transportation, homemaker services, information and assistance, nutrition education, foster grandparents, senior companions, retired senior volunteers, legal assistance, and more. The figure shown represents an unduplicated count of seniors served in "registered services," those services for which data on individual participants is collected. Other senior grant programs include 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.
22. The Office of Elder Fraud and Assistance, within the Office of Public Advocacy, was created by statute in September of 2006. Its mission is to investigate claims involving the financial exploitation of Alaskans age 60 and older, and to seek civil remedies on behalf of elders unable to bring a complaint without assistance.