

Innovations in Aging Collaborative



Aging in El Paso County, Colorado

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Executive Summary

What will happen to society in the near future when an estimated 20% of the U.S. population will be over the age of 65? The confluence of three demographic trends brings this issue to the center of our attention. The first trend results from the surge in births following World War II; the second trend is the increase in life expectancy; the third trend is the declining birthrate after 1964. Taken together, these three trends point to enormous future demands on Social Security, Medicare and local public and private services that serve the needs of the over-65 population.

The new demographic described in this report outlines both promising opportunities and an enormous need to respond in new and better ways. The growth in the older adult population provides opportunities for new jobs, products and services, along with challenges that will require collaborations. What innovative programs and projects can we encourage that will make Colorado Springs a better place in which to age?

EL PASO COUNTY SENIORS TODAY

According to the 2010 Census, there were 62,051 El Paso County residents 65 years of age or older. This had grown from 44,787 seniors in 2000, a 39% increase. It was almost double the 20.4% increase in the total population of El Paso County from 516,933 to 622,263 during that same 10-year period. The highest concentration of seniors is in some of the county's least populous census tracts.

The Frail Elderly: The frail elderly populations – those 85 and older - are also concentrated in a few areas in Colorado Springs.

Military Retirees: There are 49,052 veterans in Colorado, 41.3% of them 65+. About 9,973 of El Paso County's retirees are military retirees or survivors.

THE AGING TSUNAMI

The 78.3 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 - commonly referred to as the Baby Boom Generation - comprise 26% of the U.S. population. On average this generation will live to 83, and many will live well into their 90s and beyond. The over-85 age cohort is growing faster than any other group.

Colorado has traditionally had a small over-65 population and a large young population. In 2010 we were fourth lowest among the 50 states in the share of 65+ and sixth highest in baby boomers.

Over the next 30 years (2010-2040), the Demography Office projects that the population age 65 and over in El Paso County will increase from 61,788 in 2010 to 172,394 in 2040.

This 179.0% increase is more than triple the 57.6% increase in the total population.

The increase in seniors will come from two sources. Based on historic trends, many current residents will retire in Colorado. There will also be in-migration of older retirees who want to be near their baby boom children.

Trends in Aging: The proportion of Colorado workers 65 and over is projected to double by 2020. As the number of aging households increases, median household income will fall, resulting in growing poverty and income inequality. Also, people's expenditures change as they age. This may affect city and county sales tax revenues as spending on taxable goods declines and shifts to nontaxable goods and services.

The new over-65 population will be better educated than the population as a whole. The minority population will grow at almost twice the rate of the non-Hispanic white population, leading to a more ethnically diverse group of seniors in the future

In 2010 in El Paso County there were 6.2 people of working age for each retirement-aged resident. That ratio plunges to 3.1 by 2040. A much smaller number of employees will have to provide Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid for a much larger group of seniors.

PROBLEMS SENIORS FACE

The elderly are generally considered a special needs group. There is a high correlation between age and disabilities. Seniors rely more heavily than the population in general on public transportation, medical care, mental health services and specialized housing. The problems seniors face include: lack of affordable housing; lack of public transportation; lack of essential health services; lack of personal services; lack of adequate savings; overspending; cost of health care; fraud; and ageism.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING THE COMMUNITY

The Challenges: Jobs that will need to be filled, especially direct care workers and nursing care; information availability and assistance; housing, including new facilities, especially continuing care facilities; hospice care; assistance in planning for the future.

The Opportunities: More jobs, especially in the health and social services sector; economic development opportunities; amenities, activities and programs for older tourists; living communities or Villages, including intergenerational living communities.

A NEW VISION OF AGING

Current thinking holds that the baby boomer is more likely to see the years after 65 as the third stage of life, another 20 years or more, much too long to spend looking back. They see themselves directing their energy towards positive social purpose; many baby boomers consider work to be a part of retirement; the baby boom generation will remain physically active; one-third of baby boomers say they plan to participate in community service after retirement.

There will be increased demand for intergenerational synergy with the development of community-based initiatives that bridge generations. Lifelong learning will engage a significant partnership between colleges and universities, younger students, and seniors.

CONCLUSIONS

A broad range of opportunities and challenges faces El Paso County as its large baby boom population moves into the traditional retirement years. There is a role for policy makers, local and national nonprofits, employers, local and regional governments, transportation providers, the military, faith-based institutions, special interest clubs, educational institutions, news organizations, public and private providers of funds and the entire community to be involved. We can mobilize our community to work on long-term care issues and to bring about improvements in the service system.

The data are inescapable. Our senior population will triple over the next 30 years. But it will be unlike the senior population of previous decades. We must develop new images of the elderly, new stories with alternative futures. Establishing goals, mileposts and measures of success are critical to successful planning. We must find ways to provide products and services that enable seniors to live safely and independently in the environment of their choice. There is time to do this. To do otherwise is too expensive. There is simply no time to waste.

To view the full report, visit our website: www.innovationsinaging.org