

## Senior Snapshot: Older Alaskans in 2009

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 2009**, we offer a number of data points, which corroborate the following observations:

- ◆ For the second year in a row, Alaska 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 seven years (for example, the Southcentral region's seniors have increased by over 60%), all nine regions have witnessed an increase in their senior populations of at least 18% during this time period.
- ◆ Older baby boomers are swelling the ranks of the youngest group of seniors, now the fastest-growing age group, second to 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.
- ◆ While Alaska seniors appear less likely to be living in poverty than the national average among seniors, many of them are struggling to get by financially. Over 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 13 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 2009, that meant no more than \$23,678 for a single senior, and no more than \$31,868 for a couple.
- ◆ Retired seniors as a whole contribute approximately \$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 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.
- ◆ 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 3,818 die in a given one-year period, while for every 100,000 U.S. seniors, 4,722 die during that period. In other words, an Alaskan senior is 19 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 20 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 more than six years older than the average resident of a decade ago.
- ◆ A substantial 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 have increased by 169% in the last four years alone.

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Population Age 60+	2008	% of Area's Total 2008 Pop.	Seniors Change Since 2001	Comments
<i>Statewide Total</i>	79,850	11.7%	+43.2%	<i>All census areas. 4.6% increase over 2007.</i> <b>NOTE 1</b>
I. Bethel Area	2,089	8.5%	+18.3%	Bethel, Wade Hampton
II. Interior	11,254	10.8%	+46.5%	Fairbanks NSB, Yukon-Koyukuk, Denali, SE Fbks
III. North Slope	579	8.6%	+19.6%	North Slope Borough
IV. Anchorage	31,220	11.0%	+39.6%	Municipality of Anchorage
V. Southcentral	19,533	13.5%	+61.1%	Kenai Peninsula, Mat-Su, Valdez-Cordova
VI. Aleutians	471	6.6%	+26.3%	Aleutians East, Aleutians West
VII. Southwest	2,307	11.1%	+36.7%	Bristol Bay, Dillingham, Kodiak, Lake & Peninsula
VIII. Northwest	1,588	9.4%	+21.2%	Nome, Northwest Arctic
IX. Southeast	10,809	15.6%	+35.4%	Haines, Juneau, Ketchikan, Prince of Wales, Sitka, Skagway-Hoonah-Angoon, Wrangell-Petersburg, Yakutat
		<b>% of AK Seniors:</b>		
Age 60-64	30,395	38.1%	+62.9%	Older baby boomers entering this group. <b>NOTE 2</b>
Age 65-74	31,019	38.8%	+34.1%	
Age 75-84	13,795	17.3%	+24.1%	
Age 85+	4,641	5.8%	+61.4%	
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>
<b>Economic Status</b>				
Seniors' Economic Contribution to Alaska	2004: \$1.461 billion*	2008: \$1.662 billion**		*ISER figure from "Report on the Economic Well-Being of Alaska Seniors" (2007) **2009 ACOA estimate. <b>NOTE 4</b>
Percent in Poverty (Age 65+)	Alaska, 2008:	U.S., 2008:		2009 Current Population Survey/American Social and Economic Supplement
Below 100% FPL	3.4% (Rank: #51)	9.7%		Not adjusted for higher living costs in Alaska (FPL = Federal Poverty Level)
Average Monthly Social Security Pmt, Age 65+	AK, Dec. 2008: \$1,087	U.S., Dec. 2008: \$1,123		A total of 45,710 Alaskans age 65+ received Social Security benefits (92%). Social Security Administration. <b>NOTE 5</b>
Average Monthly PERS Pmt	\$1,503.57	# of seniors: 10,705		AK Dept. of Administration, Div. of Retirement & Benefits. Public Employees Retirement System. <b>NOTE 6</b>
Average Monthly TRS Pmt	\$2,715.70	# of seniors: 4,087		AK Dept. of Administration, Div. of Retirement & Benefits. Teachers Retirement System. <b>NOTE 7</b>
# of Senior Benefits Recipients	Nov. 2009:	% of Seniors Age 65+:		Alaska Division of Public Assistance. <b>NOTE 8</b>
<i>Statewide</i>	9,987	20.2%		<i>7.3% increase over Nov. 2008 statewide total</i>
I. Bethel Area	812	58.9%		0.6% increase over Nov. 2008 region total
II. Interior	1,200	17.6%		8.2% increase over Nov. 2008 region total
III. North Slope	45	13.2%		9.8% increase over Nov. 2008 region total
IV. Anchorage	3,572	18.6%		6.5% increase over Nov. 2008 region total
V. Southcentral	2,363	19.3%		9.8% increase over Nov. 2008 region total
VI. Aleutians	39	20.3%		21.9% increase over Nov. 2008 region total
VII. Southwest	422	29.7%		9.0% increase over Nov. 2008 region total
VIII. Northwest	413	40.2%		5.6% increase over Nov. 2008 region total
IX. Southeast	1,120	16.5%		8.7% increase over Nov. 2008 region total
Seniors (Age 60+) on Food Stamps	Nov. 2009: 3,861 (60+)	Nov. 2009: 2,239 (66+)		Alaska Division of Public Assistance; senior (age 60+) Food Stamp recipients up 22% since November 2008

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Avg. Mo. Benefit (Food Stamps)	\$160.72 (Age 60-65)	\$99.23 (Age 66+)	Alaska Division of Public Assistance. <b>NOTE 9</b>
Seniors Receiving Old Age Assistance (Adult Public Assistance)	November 2009: number of AK seniors: 5,045 (29.1% of all APA)	November 2009: average amount of APA monthly benefit, all recipients: \$277.91	Alaska Division of Public Assistance. <b>NOTE 10</b>
Senior Medicaid Eligibles	Dec. 2009: 9,064	% of Senior Pop.: 11.4%	Alaska Division of Public Assistance

Senior Health	Alaska	U.S.	Comments
# with ADRD (estimate)	2008: 5,702	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+)	2008: 3,817.6	2006: 4,721.9	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. <b>NOTE 12</b>
Suicide rate (per 100,000 seniors age 65+)	2004-2008: 19.9	2006: 14.2	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. <b>NOTE 13</b>
Other accidental deaths (per 100,000 age 65+)	2004-2008: 78.2	2006: 53.8	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. "Other accidental deaths" exclude fatal falls. <b>NOTE 14</b>
Alcohol-induced deaths	2004-2008: 34.0	2006: 11.6	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. <b>NOTE 15</b>
Leading causes of death:	2008 (AK):	2006 (U.S.):	Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. <b>NOTE 16</b>
Cancer	1,015.1	1,040.0	Per 100,000 age 65+
Heart diseases	833.1	1,370.2	Per 100,000 age 65+
Stroke	250.7	314.0	Per 100,000 age 65+
Chronic lower respiratory diseases	285.1	286.8	Per 100,000 age 65+
Alzheimer's disease	157.7	192.3	Per 100,000 age 65+
Diabetes mellitus	133.5	140.5	Per 100,000 age 65+
Binge drinkers	2.7%	3.2%	Age 65+ - 2008 BRFSS. <b>NOTE 17</b>
Heavy drinkers	3.4%	3.0%	Age 65+ - 2008 BRFSS. <b>NOTE 18</b>
Smokers	9.7%	8.2%	Age 65+ - 2008 BRFSS. <b>NOTE 19</b>
Disabled seniors	39.4%	32.7%	Age 65+ who are "limited in activities because of physical, mental or emotional problems" – 2008 BRFSS. <b>NOTE 20</b>
Obese seniors	31.6%	22.9%	Age 65+ - 2008 BRFSS. <b>NOTE 21</b>
People with "frequent mental distress"	2008: Age 65+: 8.7% Age <65: 13.5%	2006: Age 65+: 17.9% Age <65: 14.2%	2006, 2008 BRFSS. <b>NOTE 22</b>
Pioneer Home residents at Level III	12/31/2009: 58.1%		Data provided by Div. of Pioneer Homes. Level III is the most advanced level of care.
Avg. age of PH resident	Sept. 1, 2009: 82.3 years	1998: 76 years	Data provided by Div. of Pioneer Homes.
Nursing home costs – private room, daily rate	AK, 2009: \$618*	U.S. avg, 2009: \$219	*AK: highest cost in the U.S.; MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2009 Market Survey of Long-Term Care Costs
Older Alaskans Medicaid waiver recipients	FY 2009: 1,651	FY 2008: 1,536	Info from Senior & Disability Services. <b>NOTE 23</b>
Senior grants clients	FY 2009: 15,352	FY 2008: 16,502	Info from Senior & Disability Services. <b>NOTE 24</b>

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Senior Safety			Comments
Long-Term Care Ombudsman complaints	FY 2009: 337	FY 2008: 208	Complaints involving seniors (age 60+) in long-term care. Data from the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman
Adult Protective Services reports	FY 2009: 2,748	FY 2005: 1,021	Adult Protective Services (APS), Senior & Disabilities Services
Corrections intakes of seniors	CY 2009 636:	CY 2008: 787	Intakes of seniors (age 60+) to correctional facilities any time during 2009; info from AK Dept. of Corrections
Senior offenders in AK prisons	12/31/2009: 150	12/31/2008: 148	Per AK Dept. of Corrections; 144 are male, 6 female; 141 felony, 9 misdemeanor,

### NOTES:

1. Data from Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development's 2008 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 2008 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 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' 2009 contributions by applying the increases in the Anchorage Consumer Price Index for 2005 (3.1%), 2006 (3.2%), 2007 (2.2%), and 2008 (4.6%) 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 45,710 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 2009, 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 40% higher than that of U.S. seniors as a whole.
14. Alaska's "Other Accidental Deaths" (excluding fatal falls) are 45% higher for seniors here compared with the U.S. as a whole.
15. Alaska seniors are nearly three times more likely than U.S. seniors as a whole to experience an alcohol-induced death.
16. Note that Alaska seniors are less likely to die from any of the six leading causes of death. Death rates from cancer, diabetes mellitus, or chronic lower respiratory disease are slightly lower. Death rates from stroke and Alzheimer's disease are moderately lower. And death rates from heart disease are substantially lower in Alaska.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. 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.
20. 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.
21. 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.
22. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an ongoing multi-state phone survey conducted in Alaska by the Division of Public Health. "Frequent Mental Distress" was defined as having 14 or more days of "not good" mental health during the last 30 days. "Frequent Mental Distress" was last assessed in the national BRFSS survey in 2006. However, the Alaska BRFSS survey includes this measure each year.
23. 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.
24. The figure shown represents an unduplicated count of seniors served in "registered services," those services for which data on individual participants is collected. 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.