

The Demographics of Seniors

While America's seniors may be better off today than in the past, they are not a homogeneous group and they are not (by and large) a wealthy group, especially if you discount the equity in homes they may own. According to Census 2000, the National Council on the Aging (and other sources as cited):

- ▶ There are 35 million people ages 65 and older.
- ▶ In 2000, the median income of people 65 and older was \$19,167 for men and \$10,898 for women.
- ▶ 10.6 percent of older people (3.3 million) live below the poverty level. Of these, approximately 9 percent are white, 26 percent are black, and 21 percent are Latinos.
- ▶ About 1.5 percent of seniors (4.2 million people) are 85 years of age or older.
- ▶ There are an estimated 50,000 centenarians in the U.S., a figure expected to grow to more than 800,000 by the year 2050.
- ▶ Only a very small percentage of older Americans live in nursing homes (1.6 million in 2000, or 4.5 percent of the senior population). The proportion in nursing homes rises steeply with age (18 percent of those 85 or older).
- ▶ Among older Americans not living in nursing homes, about two out of three live with spouses or other family members. Twenty percent of older men live alone, and 42 percent of older women live alone.
- ▶ 80 percent of older adults who need long-term care receive that care, not in nursing homes but in their own homes or in other settings from informal caregivers (family or friends), who number 20 to 25 million. Approximately 7 million of these caregivers provide or manage care long-distance (from at least an hour away).
- ▶ According to the Administration on Aging, the great majority of caregivers are women (75 percent), a quarter of whom care for both older parents and children. Half of all caregivers also work outside the house.
- ▶ Seniors who do not have children living nearby are more likely to choose assisted, supported, or shared living arrangements, regardless of their physical limitations. (Housing America's Seniors, Joint Center for Housing Studies, Harvard University.)

▶ More than a third of renters in the relatively well-off 55-to-64 age bracket are spending 40 percent or more of their income on housing. This situation worsens with age as seniors face higher healthcare costs that strain their already limited budgets (National Association of Home Builders).

What these facts illustrate is that there is tremendous stress on seniors and on their families to find, maintain and afford housing; to acquire and pay for light, personal care assistance, such as housekeeping, or more professional-level nursing or long-term care; and to access other needed services, such as transportation, that can keep them independent and enable them to stay connected to their communities.