

Elderly Issues

Challenges of Global Aging

The United States is faced with profound challenges associated with dramatic increases in the numbers of people living to an advanced old age. This 21st Century phenomenon, shared by many nations, can be attributed to advances in science, technology and medicine leading to reductions in infant and maternal mortality, infectious and parasitic diseases, occupation safety measures, and improvements in nutrition and education.

Rapidly expanding numbers of very old people represent a social phenomenon without historical precedent. Today, the number of persons aged 60 years or older is estimated to be 629 million. That number is projected to grow to almost 2 billion by 2050, when the population of older persons will be larger than the population of children (0-14 years) for the first time in human history.

Fifty-four percent, the largest share of the world's older persons, live in Asia. Europe has the next largest share, with 24 percent.

[Sources: An Aging World 2001, U.S. Department of Commerce, UN Department of Public Information, DP/2264, March 2002.]

Aging Americans

Today, thanks to the strides made in our health care and standard of living, 43 million, or one in six, Americans have celebrated their 60th birthday. Improved health and programs, such as Social Security, Medicare and pension plans, have made it possible for most Americans to enjoy almost 14 years of retirement with a degree of economic security that few older people had at the turn of the century—years that offer the opportunity for leisure activities, second careers, and volunteer service. Nevertheless, many older Americans are at risk of losing their independence, including:

- The 3 million Americans who are 85 or older,
- Those living alone without a caregiver,
- Members of minority groups,
- Older persons with physical or mental impairments,
- Low-income older persons, and
- Those who are abused, neglected, or exploited.



Of the 9 million Americans over age 65 who live alone, two million say they have no one to turn to if they need help. Lack of a caregiver is a serious problem for those older persons who have chronic conditions and limitations on their ability to care for themselves and their homes. Their problems are often compounded by increased medical costs due to poor health and the need for more supportive services. Unfortunately, those who are most vulnerable are also most likely to live alone and to have limited incomes. Eighty percent of those living alone are women and nearly half of persons aged 85 or older live alone. Older women, the very old, and minority elderly, have, on average, the lowest incomes among the older population which severely limits their ability to purchase the health care, goods, services, and housing options which could help them to remain independent.

Aging in the Future

In the future, America's older population will grow and change rapidly. By the year 2030, those 60 and older will more than double to 85 million, while those 85+ will triple to 8 million. At the same time, the number of minority elderly will increase far more rapidly than the general population. While the number of older white Americans will increase by 97 percent, elderly black Americans will increase by 265 percent, and Hispanic Americans by 530 percent. The minority elderly tend to have shorter life expectancies and more serious health problems at younger ages than do white Americans. They are also sometimes less able to advocate for themselves because of cultural, language, or educational barriers. As a group, they, like older women, have limited incomes due to histories of work that offered low wages and few pension benefits.

While a great deal of progress has been made in establishing community-based service systems, many communities do not yet have the range of programs needed, and some report that they have waiting lists for services. Meeting the needs of older Americans goes far beyond the efforts of government. It requires the talents and commitment of active older people and a range of groups and organizations. The aging of America presents many challenges, but it also offers many opportunities. Older Americans represent a great reservoir of talent, experience, and knowledge, which can and is being used to better their communities and the Nation.

[SOURCE - http://dde.carlisle.army.mil/tcefm/tcefm_main.htm]

For more information ...

U.S. Administration on Aging

<http://www.aoa.gov/>

Department of Health and Human Services
Washington, DC 20201

North Carolina Division of Aging

<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/aging/vol.htm>