

Considerations of an Aging Nation: Americans are Getting Older

Radical Changes Across the Nation's Age Demographic

NEW YORK, NY, USA, July 4, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Welcome to NewsWorld's first multi-part [exclusive series on Aging in America](#). We will be running this in-depth piece just as America celebrates its own birthday.

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"Getting old is like climbing a mountain; you get a little out of breath, but, the view is much better." – Ingrid Bergman



Science and technology are helping us understand that view from the top of the mountain. One local team in Philadelphia, as well as other teams around the country, are seeing a significant impact on the United States that's about to get bigger, based on its aging population.

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Michele Berman

News World: Aging in America a 3-Part Series

A research team in Boise State University is working to ensure that seniors get the best view possible from the later years of life. Nonetheless, the job is a bit of a struggle as the number of seniors in our nation grows exponentially. Marilyn Jackson is at the heart of this demographic shift in Idaho as she is part of the group of people getting much older. At 82

years of age, Jackson is among the quickest growing demographic of Idaho's inhabitants.

Researchers identify them as the oldest of the elderly, consisting of individuals 75 years and older.

Jackson credits her longevity to a lifetime of exercise. Working out three times per week, eating a healthy diet, avoiding bad habits like smoking, and embracing the heart-healthy art of drinking wine, she is enjoying the perks of being a healthy senior. Those over 75 years of age, like Jackson, now make up six percent of the inhabitants of Idaho. Over the next eight years, that demographic will grow

by a staggering 23 percent. By contrast, the section of the population under five years old will increase by just four percent during the same 8-year stretch.

To put it simply, Idahoans are living longer while birth rates are dropping. And this trend is one that is also affecting Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The Boomers Keep on Booming
According to Michelle Sahl, Ph.D., associate teaching professor in the Health Administration Department at Drexel University in Philadelphia, “The senior population is exploding.”



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“By 2050,” she says, “one out of every five people across the globe will be seniors.”

The trend is a worldwide one, but in the United States, it is hitting especially close to home. “Pennsylvania comes in fourth as a state, after Maine, West Virginia, and Florida, in having the highest proportion of seniors,” Sahl says, while also noting that this is specifically true in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where there is a particularly high concentration of seniors. Sahl makes a point by reporting that – by the year 2050 – 3/4 of the world’s population will inhabit urban areas. “You can imagine the volume of seniors represented within Philadelphia,” she adds.

Kristine Mulhorn, Ph.D., chair of the Health Administration Department at Drexel University, further illustrates the aging future of Philadelphia, “90% of the senior population between now and 2040 is expected to occur in urban counties in Pennsylvania.”

Among the many reasons for the concentration in urban areas is the availability of medical care suppliers and infrastructure that’s already set up to service a significant number of people.

The numbers for growth in the 75+ age bracket are staggering, and with the impending change ahead, now is the time to start mapping out accommodations for older people. Mulhorn and Sahl forecast that new opportunities will be born from this demand.

Noting the health policy issues in conjunction with the public policy issues, with which her students have become implicitly familiar, she explains that there is a wide range of community-based services in which they can get involved. From advocacy to direct service areas, students can organize programs, and run them in ways that will enhance neighborhoods, transforming them into healthy communities.

Beyond policy work, there is action to be taken in advocacy and leadership positions in non-profit organizations, and Mulhorn specifically mentions housing, “... There will be roles in housing, recreational services, and health services which focus on serving elderly clients.”

Caregiving and Senior Care is a Growing Issue

Expecting community and home-based services dedicated to older clients to grow, Mulhorn points to an anticipated demand for those individuals working in healthcare who understand the vast range of services that will be needed by seniors. She adds, “Even transportation authorities in the future are going to have to have segments designed to support the elderly.”

Years ago, Michele Berman, owner of the in-home care company Comfort Keepers of Philadelphia, recognized the increasing need for services that cater to that age bracket. That’s why she and her brother began Comfort Keepers Philadelphia, to help provide aging-in-place services to the seniors in the city as the demographic increases each year.

“We understand the challenges many families face,” says Berman. “The role of family caregiver can be overwhelming, and as the population of citizens over the age of 75 increases in the Philadelphia area, more and more families face this dilemma. We know exactly how important it is to you that your aging or disabled parent gets the assistance they need while holding onto as much of their independence as possible.”

It Starts with Infrastructure

Seniors residing in Philadelphia face a distinctive and sophisticated set of challenges. [Transportation catering to seniors](#), for instance, has become an industry of its own. A large-scale development task stemmed in this issue is negotiating the flow of traffic to complement both daily commuters and seniors. Seniors need access to destinations around the city, such as doctor’s offices, drug stores, and grocery stores, while commuters are simultaneously trying to get to work on time.

Though potholes, broken roads, and broken stop lights create problems for commuters, those issues are significantly compounded for seniors, who struggle for access to bus routes, bus availability, and for whom broken sidewalks can create safety threats and insurmountable obstacles.

There are oft overlooked issues with which seniors regularly grapple, such as the timing of traffic lights, which are often inadequate for seniors struggling with mobility and balance to get from one end of the road to the other.

A lack of participatory social environment and the pressures of gentrification may also be damaging to both physical health and mental well-being.

Cities are teeming with professionals and students, who are deadline driven and racing the clock at all hours. With everyone on the move and in a hurry, the environment lacks warmth, and resources for older adults who seek a vibrant social environment are scarce.

Coupled with the pressures of gentrification throughout the urban landscape, our pressure-cooker society creates a dangerous scenario in which a senior adult might need to venture out for basic needs like groceries.

A mixed-income area is one possible solution that large cities like Philadelphia will have to consider if they plan to successfully accommodate the oldest age brackets in the U.S. population. There are more likely to be combined and intergenerational communities in mixed-income areas. This type of environment is beneficial for the seniors and the youngsters.

Mulhorn suggests that city zoning can guide these initiatives, but additional changes will be required to address transportation and infrastructure.

Philadelphia needs to be safe for its aging population now and in the future. The federal regulations laid out by the Older Americans Act ensure that financing will be available to individuals for essential services, home maintenance, and health in their homes.

Sahl notes that budgetary issues, crime, and public school systems, and other challenges facing a city, push something like creating an ideal environment for seniors to the back burner. Says Sahl, "All cities are very aware of the issues, but most particularly those with a lot of seniors."

Awareness is Critical for this Fast-Growing Issue

As with everything, awareness is critical. To accommodate the [aging population in coming years](#), people, particularly those in leadership roles, need to have a sense of the big picture. Only with such a perspective can it be ensured that urban areas are safe and functional for all inhabitants.

"It's a mix in any urban area between appealing to those with the cash to spend versus seniors who have real physiological and social needs while living on fixed incomes," comments Sahl.

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