

# Census Bureau Releases Comprehensive Analysis of Fast-Growing 90-and-Older Population

(Courtesy: Emmett Schmarsow, Program Manager, COAs & Senior Centers, ELD)

The nation's 90-and-older population nearly tripled over the past three decades, reaching 1.9 million in 2010, according to a report released today by the U.S. Census Bureau and supported by the [National Institute on Aging](#). Over the next four decades, this population is projected to more than quadruple.

Because of increases in life expectancy at older ages, people 90 and older now comprise 4.7 percent of the older population (age 65 and older), as compared with only 2.8 percent in 1980. By 2050, this share is likely to reach 10 percent.

The majority of people 90 and older report having one or more disabilities, living alone or in a nursing home and graduating from high school. People in this age group also are more likely to be women and to have higher widowhood, poverty and disability rates than people just under this age cutoff.

These findings come from [90+ in the United States: 2006-2008](#), which presents an overview of this age group and a comparative analysis of selected demographic and socio-economic differences between people 90 and older and their younger counterparts within the older population. Statistics for the report, which go down to the state level, come from the 2006-2008 American Community Survey 3-year estimates and 2008 1-year estimates, as well as census and projections data.

"Traditionally, the cutoff age for what is considered the 'oldest old' has been age 85," said Census Bureau demographer Wan He, "but increasingly people are living longer and the older population itself is getting older. Given its rapid growth, the 90-and-older population merits a closer look.

"Previously, relatively little research focused on this increasingly important population group, and this report attempts to fill that void," she continued. "The American Community Survey, with its large sample size in multiyear data sets, allows an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the characteristics of the 90-and-older population."

An older person's likelihood of living in a nursing home increases sharply with age. While about only 1 percent of people in their upper 60s and 3 percent in their upper 70s were nursing home residents, the proportion rose to about 20 percent for those in their lower 90s, more than 30 percent for people in their upper 90s, and nearly 40 percent for centenarians.

While nearly all people in their 90s who lived in a nursing home had a disability (98.2 percent), the vast majority (80.8 percent) of those who did not live in a nursing home also had one or more disabilities. Difficulty doing errands alone and performing general mobility-related activities of walking or climbing stairs were the most common types, which indicates that many who live in households may need assistance with everyday activities. (See [Figure 1](#).)

The proportion of people age 90 to 94 having disabilities is more than 13 percentage points higher than that of 85- to 89-year-olds.

### Other highlights:

--Given that people age 90 and older included in the report were born in 1918 or earlier, an unexpectedly high proportion (61.3 percent) had completed high school or above. Nearly 28 percent continued their education beyond high school, about half of whom completed a bachelor's degree or higher.

--The 90-and-older population is overwhelmingly (88.1 percent) white. Additionally, blacks represented 7.6 percent, Asians 2.2 percent and Hispanics (who may be of any race) about 4 percent.

--The annual median personal income for people 90 and older during 2006-2008 was \$14,760 (in 2008 inflation-adjusted dollars). Almost half (47.9 percent) of this amount came from Social Security and another 18.3 percent came from retirement pension income. All in all, 92.3 percent of those 90 and older received income from the Social Security Administration (86.2 percent received Social Security income only with the remainder receiving either Supplemental Security Income only or both).

--In 2006-2008, 14.5 percent of people 90 and older lived in poverty, a higher rate than for those 65-89 (9.6 percent).

--Among the 90-and-older population, women outnumber men by a ratio of nearly 3 to 1. There were 38 men for every 100 women ages 90 to 94, with the ratio dropping to 26 for ages 95 to 99 and 24 for those 100 and older.

--More than 80 percent of women 90 and older were widowed, while more than 40 percent of men this age were married.

--In 2006-2008, half of men 90 and older lived in a household with family members and/or unrelated individuals, less than one-third lived alone, and about 15 percent were in an institutionalized living arrangement such as a nursing home. In contrast, less than one-third of women in this age group lived in a household with family members and/or unrelated individuals, four in 10 lived alone, and another quarter were in institutionalized living arrangements. (See [Figure 2.](#))

--Those 90 and older were almost universally (99.5 percent) covered by health insurance.

At the end of November, the Census Bureau will release a brief from the 2010 Census on the nation's 65-and-older population, which grew at a faster rate than the total population between 2000 and 2010. The report looks at the population size, growth and distribution of the older population at the national level and at lower levels of geography — regions, states, counties, metropolitan/micropolitan areas and places.

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As is the case with all surveys, statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons made in this report have been tested and found to be statistically significant at the 90-percent confidence level, unless otherwise noted. Please consult the tables for specific margins or error. For more information, go to

[http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data\\_documentation/documentation\\_main/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data_documentation/documentation_main/)