

Q. What do we learn about older people from the U.S. Census forms that we filled out?

A. Millions of Americans filled out their Census forms for the year 2000 count. Here is a "Profile of Older Americans" taken from Census numbers filled out in past years. Some of the numbers may surprise you:

There were 34.4 million Americans over the age of 65 in 1998. They represented 12.7 % of the population, about one in every eight Americans.

Since 1990, the number of older Americans has increased by 10% -- or another 3.2 million seniors, compared to an 8% increase in under 65 population.

There are 143 elderly women for every 100 elderly men. For people age 85 and older, there are 241 women for every 100 men. In this century, the percentage of Americans 65+ has more than tripled, from 4% in 1900, to nearly 13% in 1998. The number of seniors has increased eleven fold, from 3.1 million in 1900 to 34.4 million by 1998.

In 1997, a person reaching age 65 had an average life expectancy of another 17.6 years (19 years for women, 15.8 for men). A child born in 1997 could expect to live 76.5 years, about 29 years longer than a child born in 1900.

In 1998, another 5,190 people celebrated their 65th birthday every day, and each day 4,794 people age 65 and older died. In other words, we gained 396 seniors per day, or 145,000 per year.

By the year 2030, there will be roughly 70 million seniors - more than twice their number in 1998. Today, elders represent around 13% of the population, but by 2030 they will comprise 20% of the population.

45% of older women were widowed in 1998. There are 8.4 million widows, compared to 2 million widowers.

80% of older men and 58% of older women live in families. Of those 85 and over, only 45% live in families.

96% of elders in 1996 did not live in a nursing home, 4% did. Nearly 20% of those age 85 and over were living in a nursing home.

11 states have elderly populations of 14% or more of the total population. Massachusetts is number 11 at 14%. Massachusetts has 860,604 people over the age of 65.

For persons age 65+, 36% had incomes under \$10,000 in 1998. Only 22% had income of \$25,000 or more.

About 12% of older Americans were still in the labor force in 1998. Social Security was the major source of income. 91% of elders had Social Security income. 63% had income from assets. Only 43% had a public or private pension, and 21% had earnings from wages.

About 3.4 million elders were living below the federal poverty line in 1998. Around 10.5% of elders were in poverty, plus another 6.3% were considered near poor. In total, one out of six elders was considered poor, or near poor.

The poverty rate for older women was nearly 13%, compared to 7% for older men. Older people living alone were much more likely to be poor (20%).

These Census numbers helped the federal and state government plan for future needs and services for Older Americans. They also tell us how we are aging as a nation.

####