



COMMISSION  
ON AGING

# Recent Trends & Demographics

## The Graying of America

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Thanks to a host of factors, including advances in medicine and technology, there are more Americans living longer than ever before. According to the 2000 Census, there are 35 million older adults in the United States, representing 12.4% of the total population. These numbers are expected to double by 2030, when it is projected that one in five Americans will be 65 or older. Senior population trends have been astounding in the last one hundred years. In just the last 100 years, (1900 to 2000), the number of older Americans increased eleven-fold, or 1100%! Even more astounding is the growth seen in the population age 85 and older. From 1900 to 2000, the number of older adults 85 and over increased 34 times. This cohort of older Americans continues to be the fastest growing, and is expected to increase from four million in 2000 to nineteen million in 2050.

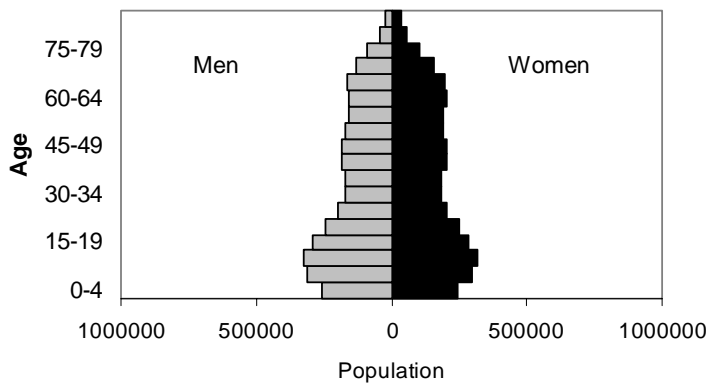
In the United States, a woman reaching age 65 today will live an average 19.2 additional years. A 65-year old man will have an average 16.3 additional years. Given these numbers, it is erroneous for anyone to believe that "life ends at 65". Besides, according to a 2001 survey by the National Council on Aging, Americans are very optimistic about their longevity. Sixty percent of survey participants expected to live past 80. Forty percent expected to live past 90.

With these incredible increases in longevity, it is particularly promising that there have been steady declines in disability rates for older adults over the last quarter of a century. The percentage of older adults with a chronic disability declined from 24% in 1982 to 21% in 1994. However, due to the increasing number of older adults, the prevalence of chronic disease in the older population has increased. The management of chronic disease will be one of the greatest challenges of our country's future. In the meantime, older adults, most of whom are healthy and vital, can work on maintaining their health. It has been estimated that seventy percent of physical decline associated with aging is related to modifiable factors such as smoking, nutrition, exercise, fall injuries, and preventative care.

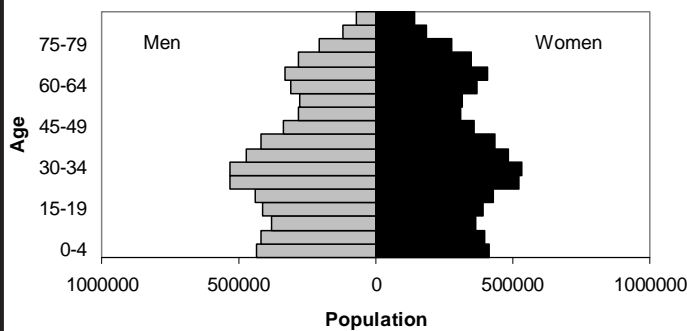
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## Older Floridians

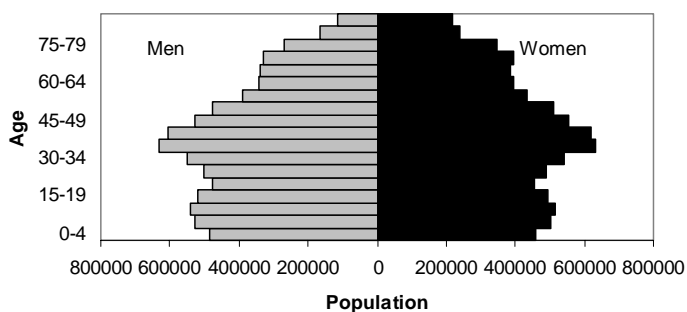
**Table 1**  
Florida Population 1970



**Table 2**  
Florida Population 1990



**Table 3**  
Florida Population 2000



Source: US Census and Florida Demographic Estimating Conference, updated 8/2002

National aging trends provide us with a good basis to which we can compare ourselves on a state and local level. Paradoxically, the nation has turned its focus on Florida to better understand the implications of national aging trends. Although the entire nation is graying, Florida has special significance in aging trends with its senior population demographics. In 2000, half of all older adults in the country lived in nine states, with Florida being the state with the *second largest number* of older adults and the *highest percentage* of older adults. According to the 2000 Census, there are 2,807,597 Floridians age 65 and over, comprising 17.6% of the total population. This is compared to 12.4% countrywide.

Florida's senior population growth rate exceeds the national rate. Although the 65+ population increased 12% for the nation in the years 1990-2000, it increased 18.5% in Florida during the same time period. Even more than at the national level, the most striking senior demographics in Florida are in the 85+ age group. From 1990-2000, the 85+ population in Florida grew by 58%. Although considerable, these growth rates are relatively low due to the small number of individuals being born during the Depression years. However, during the same time period, the number of Floridians in the 45-64 age category, the famed "baby boomers", increased by 42%, signaling the advent of a much larger senior population to come.

If we look at the population changes in Florida over the last thirty years or so, we can clearly see a shift in population demographics. The population makeup has changed significantly from 1970 (Table 1), when the bulk of the population was under 35. The population pyramids of 1990 and 2000 (Tables 2 and 3) strikingly demonstrate that the population is getting thicker in the middle and top of the pyramid, indicating that the average age of the population is increasing and that the population as a whole is older. Given the already high numbers of seniors in Florida and the upward direction of senior population growth, this next wave of older adults will result in Florida being a predominantly "mature" state.

# Orange County

Orange County is not immune to these population trends. According to the 2000 Census, Orange County has 52,770 women and 37,189 men age 65 and over, for a total of 89,959 older adults, comprising ten percent of the total population. While Orange County may not have the numbers of older adults that some areas in Florida have, our growth rates are higher than the state and nation, and are increasing quickly. In 1990, there were 72,034 older adults 65 and older, indicating a 25% increase in 2000. This is compared to 18.5% at the state level and 12% at the national level. Similar to national and state trends, the 85 and older population also has had the fastest growth rate. The number of older adults age 85 and over grew 48% from 1990 to 2000. It is projected that over the next thirty years the older adult population age 65 and over will have a combined growth rate of 178%, adding about 200,000 people to Orange County.

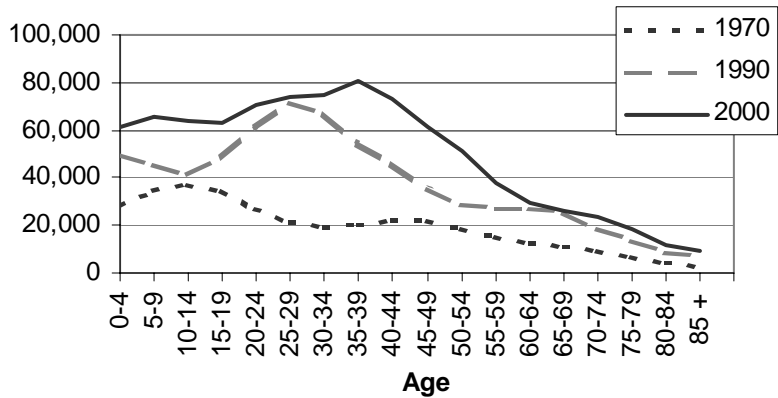
Orange County is on the cusp of having a much grayer population. An important population trend in Orange County is demonstrated in Table 4. In general, Orange

County has experienced incredible growth since the announcement of Disney in the 1970's, and continues to be the fastest growing county in Florida. Population growth projections for Orange County over the next three decades range from 83-120%. However, the Orange County population distribution is shifting significantly to the right, indicating that the population is generally becoming older in composition.

As we ride the age wave locally, we are in a unique position to benefit from the experiences of our neighbors in the state, as well as serve as a model to Florida and the nation. In fact, we have already on a local level begun to experience the growth in demographics that have yet to hit us nationally. One example is with our minority elder demographics. At the national level, minority elders comprised 16% of the older population in 2000. This percentage is expected to grow to 25% in 2030. In Orange County, the percentage of minority elders is *currently* at 26%.

**Orange County Population Distribution  
1970-2000**

**Table 4**



US Census & Florida Demographic Estimating Conference Database, updated 8/2002

The U.S. Census estimated there were 68,000 centenarians on November 1, 2000, nearly double the total on Census Day, 1990. By 2050, there will be a projected 1.1 million centenarians in the United States.



Florida and Orange County will continue to set the tone for responding to the aging of our population. Our actions at both the local and state level may have implications for an entire nation of older adults. Within Orange County, we have the opportunity to examine how we are currently responding to aging issues so that we can improve the quality of life for today's elders and prepare for greater numbers of future elders.

Perhaps one of the tasks on the local and state level may be to present a more positive image of aging by promoting the contributions and wonderful impact of older adults on our community. For example, seniors give back greatly to their communities. According to the final report of the Destination Florida Commission, in the year 2000, older Floridians contributed 7.5 million person days of volunteer time, and contributed \$2.7 billion to the state's economy through taxes and sales.

In contrast, they "cost" the state \$1.28 billion in health and human services.

But the true value of seniors is priceless. As mentors, teachers, advocates, neighbors, and colleagues, seniors enrich and guide us with the benefit of their experience and wisdom. Older adults are vital members of our community. The increases in longevity that we are experiencing are cause for celebration. It is interesting to reflect that Florida began with a search for longevity. Longevity is now upon us and shapes how we are as a nation, state, and community. In the words of noted geriatrician and vital aging advocate Dr. Robert Butler:

*"For the first time in human history the prospect of living a longer, healthy and productive life has become a reality for the majority of people...what was the privilege of the few has become the destiny of the many."*



*It is a mistake to regard age as a downhill grade toward dissolution. The reverse is true. As one grows older, one climbs with surprising strides. George Sand*

Data from this section was compiled from the following sources: Administration on Aging; Florida Department of Economic and Demographic Research; Florida Department of Elder Affairs; Gerontological Society of America; Merck Institute of Aging and Health; National Council on Aging; Orange County Government Planning Division; US Census Bureau

Picture courtesy of the Administration on Aging



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