

Executive Summary

Aging in Arizona: Health Status of Older Arizonans provides a comprehensive view of the health status, morbidity, and mortality among Arizonans 65 years of age and older. Designed to be a resource for those tasked with developing and implementing health policy for an increasingly aged populace, this report draws from multiple resources on the health, illness, and mortality of Arizona's older adults. Population estimates and projections were used to examine Arizona's current population composition by age and race/ethnicity as well as to estimate how Arizona's population structure will change over the next 40 years. Next, the health behaviors and chronic disease burden experienced by Arizona's seniors were examined using the 2012 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). Moving from population prevalence of health-related behaviors and morbidities to healthcare utilization among Arizona's aging adults, 2012 Hospital Discharge Data (HDD) was used to summarize emergency room (ER) and inpatient discharges by first-listed diagnosis separated by gender. Finally, the leading causes of death for Arizonans age 65 and older were identified separately by gender in 2012, with recent trends (2002 – 2012) in the leading causes of deaths also being analyzed.

Based on a number of social and epidemiological factors, the coming half century will see an unprecedented shift in the age structure of our society. In Arizona, the total population is expected to increase about 80 percent from 6,401,568 in 2010 to a projected 11,562,584 in 2050, while the number of Arizonans age 65 and older is expected to increase 174 percent from 883,014 in 2010 to 2,422,186 in 2050. As the proportion of Arizonans age 65 and over increases, so will the racial/ethnic diversity of our population as a whole. The increasing number and proportion of older adults in our state will necessitate the strategic planning of cost-effective health and social services to properly care for our older population.

Understanding the health of Arizona's current elderly population provides guidance in preparing for the coming growth of our older population. Compared to older adults nationally, a smaller percentage of Arizona's older population reported prior year flu shots, and this held true for prior year checkups among Arizona's older males. A significantly lower proportion of older Arizonans had been diagnosed with diabetes than nationally, but a greater percentage of Arizona males reported a skin cancer diagnosis than comparably aged males nationally. Comparisons of older adults within Arizona by gender revealed that Arizona's elderly males have a higher prevalence of heart attack and skin cancer diagnoses than Arizona's older females, but elderly females had a greater percentage reporting being diagnosed with asthma. These results suggest that focusing on increasing access to preventative health checkups and flu shots for older Arizonans should become a priority, as should greater attention to cardiovascular health and skin protection among aging men, and treatment of asthma among older women.

Focusing on the current utilization of emergency room (ER) and inpatient hospital services provides another lens to view our current population of older adults and to prepare for their progression in the coming years. According to hospital discharge records from Arizona's