

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Overview of Aging in Arizona

The current state of health and longevity among aging adults is unprecedented, providing realities that are both exciting and troublesome. Due mainly to broad public health initiatives, the major causes of death in developed countries have shifted from infectious to chronic diseases over the past century. As chronic diseases typically manifest among older adults, this transition has increased overall life expectancies, meaning a greater proportion of the population is living longer than ever before (CDC 2013). Coupled with increasing longevity, birth rates in the United States spiked after World War II but decreased sharply by the mid-1970s (CDC 2003). The combination of increased longevity and changing birth rates has caused our population's age-structure to shift, increasing the proportion of older adults experiencing the costs of chronic diseases, while simultaneously decreasing the number of younger working adults who contribute to Social Security and welfare systems through wage deductions. As the baby boom generation is just beginning to reach older adulthood, the impact of these population dynamics has yet to be fully realized.

Arizona's population of older adults represents a diverse set of perspectives coming from a wide variety of backgrounds. With increased longevity and the ability to be productive for more years of life than previous generations, Arizona's aging adults are an increasingly valuable resource. At the same time, health problems associated with aging present difficult realities that Arizonans must face together. In coming years, the composition of Arizona's older adult population will shift, increasing in overall numbers, representing a larger proportion of our population, and becoming more racially/ethnically diverse than at present. To prepare for the changing landscape of Arizona's older adults, it is imperative to understand the existing health characteristics of Arizona's older adult population.

## 1.2 Methodology

This report aims to provide relevant information on the current state of health among Arizona's older adults to those tasked with the planning and development of the public policy, healthcare infrastructure, and social support systems needed to address the changing needs of Arizona's older adults. To aid in these efforts, we provide analysis of Arizona's changing population structure, the prevalence of common chronic diseases among aging Arizonans, trends in utilization of emergency room and inpatient hospital services by older adults, and finally trends in mortality among older Arizonans. It is our hope to support the healthy aging of Arizona's older adults by providing information important to those working with and for Arizona's seniors.

This report summarizes data from multiple sources and across multiple years. Population projections were developed by the Arizona Department of Administration's (ADOA) Office of Employment and Population Statistics (<http://azstats.gov/population-estimates.aspx>). Information