

3. Health Behaviors and Chronic Diseases among Aging Arizonans

3.1 Introduction

Estimating the population prevalence of health risk factors and common chronic diseases is a crucial step in the planning of targeted and effective healthcare policy. The use of survey methodology provides an accurate and cost-effective means of estimating the population prevalence of health indicators without the burden of interviewing every state resident. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is a survey conducted in Arizona and across the United States to provide population-level estimates of important health indicators. To better understand the health behaviors of Arizona's aging population, the 2012 Arizona BRFSS survey was used to estimate the percentage of Arizona adults age 65 and older with health-related behaviors known to either harm or protect health, including exercise and obesity, routine checkups, smoking, and heavy drinking. The percentage of Arizonans living with common morbidities and chronic disease including poor mental or physical health, mobility limitations, cardiovascular diseases, cerebrovascular diseases, cancers, and pulmonary diseases was also estimated and compared to national estimates.

3.2 Methodology

The BRFSS, a telephone survey that uses random-digit dialing of both landlines and cellphones, is conducted in all 50 U.S. states as well as the District of Columbia and 3 U.S. territories (http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/about/brfss_faq.htm). The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) partners with U.S. states and territories to conduct the BRFSS survey. The survey is designed to measure the prevalence of behavioral risk factors of adults age 18 and older at the household level and to provide estimates of morbidity prevalence that are both nationally and locally representative of non-institutionalized adult populations. Sampling at the household level means older adults living in retirement facilities or nursing homes are not included in the BRFSS population. More detailed information on the survey design and execution can be found at the following address: http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/annual_data/2012/pdf/Overview_2012.pdf.

To examine health behaviors and chronic diseases among Arizona's non-institutionalized older adults, data collected in the 2012 BRFSS was restricted to adults age 65 and older. Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Arizona's older adult population are reported initially. Arizona's older adult residents were compared to the national population of adults age 65 and older on a number of health behaviors including physical activity or exercise within the past month, being either overweight or obese (having a body mass index (BMI) of 25 or greater), having routine health checkups, dental checkups, and receiving a flu shot in the past year. For males, having received a prostate specific antigen (PSA) test in the past year, and for females, having received a breast exam in the past year, also are examined. Additional measures included being a current smoker and engaging in heavy drinking (> 2 drinks a day for males and > 1 drink a day for females). Indicators of broad health status included poor mental or physical health for all of the past 30 days, activity limitations, and use of special equipment. Common chronic