

4. Emergency Room and Hospital Inpatient Discharges among Aging Arizonans

4.1 Introduction

Hospital Discharge Data (HDD) provides a useful source of information on a population's utilization of hospital emergency room (ER) and inpatient healthcare services. Among the uses of HDD data are the surveillance of injury and chronic disease, allowing for informed planning of public health policy and legislation. While HDD data does not include other information on healthcare utilization such as data from primary care physicians or urgent care clinics, HDD does provide a snapshot of Arizona's usage of emergency health services as well as treatment for more complicated and severe health problems occurring in an inpatient setting. These healthcare settings are especially important to Arizona's aging population as the impact of accidents, infectious diseases, and chronic diseases can become both more common and severe with age.

4.2 Methodology

The Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) collects hospital discharge records for inpatient and ER department visits from all Arizona licensed hospitals. This collection is required by Arizona Revised Statute (A.R.S.) § 36-125-05, and Arizona Administrative Code Title 9, Chapter 11, Articles 4 and 5. The records are collected twice each year based on patient discharge date, January 1 through June 30 discharges comprising the first data reporting and July 1 through December 31 comprising the second. Approximately 3 million discharge records are collected annually. Accuracy and completeness in reporting are required and enforced. All Arizona licensed hospitals (i.e. regulated by the Arizona Department of Health Services) are required to report. Therefore, hospitals such as Veteran's Administration, Department of Defense, and those located on tribal land are not included in the reporting.

This report examines 2012 HDD data for Arizona residents age 65 and older. A discharge occurs when a person admitted to a hospital ER or for inpatient care leaves that hospital. A person admitted more than once in a given calendar year will be counted multiple times, meaning the numbers in this report are for discharges, not persons. Discharge rates were calculated as the number of discharges for a given event divided by Arizona's population within that age group. All rates represent the number of discharges per 10,000 residents and the age group. The population denominators used to calculate rates can be found at the ADHS Health Status and Vital Statistics website (<http://www.azdhs.gov/plan/menu/info/pop/pop12/pd12.htm>).

Demographic characteristics including gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, and source of payment were summarized for all ER and inpatient discharges occurring among Arizona residents age 65 and older in 2012. The first-listed diagnosis reported for a discharge was categorized and reported by common condition, meaning that less-common disorders may not have been summarized in this report. Counts are reported for all Arizona residents age 65 and older as well as by three age groups: 65 – 74 years, 75 – 84 years, and 85 years and older.