

Figure 10 depicts the combined cause mortality rates and 95 percent confidence intervals for Arizona's older adults in 2012 and comparably aged adults nationally in 2011. As indicated by the asterisks, a number of mortality rates for Arizona's older adults in 2012 were significantly different than national estimates taken from 2011 data. Mortality rates for diseases of the heart, malignant neoplasms (cancer), cerebrovascular disease (stroke), nephritis (kidney disease), and septicemia (blood infection) were all significantly lower among Arizona's older adults in 2012 than they were among older adults nationally in 2011. Only the mortality rates for Alzheimer's disease and influenza and pneumonia were higher among Arizona's older adults in 2012 than for comparably-aged adults nationally in 2011.

Specific Leading Causes of Death

This section presents the ten leading causes of death for Arizona residents 65 years and older in 2012 by gender. As previously mentioned, leading causes of death among residents 65 years and older are generally consistent with national data.

Table 10 presents the ten specific leading causes of death for all Arizona residents 65 years and older in 2012 by age group. When comparing the specific leading causes of death to the grouped leading causes of death among Arizonans age 65 and older in 2012, there is a number of interesting findings. First, a number of specific causes of death that are components of the grouped leading causes of death are indicated, including atherosclerotic heart disease, acute myocardial infarction, and atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (diseases of the heart), and both malignant neoplasms of the bronchus and lung and of the pancreas (malignant neoplasms). Second, dementia is identified as the 5th leading cause of death among Arizona's elderly in 2012, but this classification is not included in the grouped leading causes of death originally identified by the National Center for Health Statistics (Hoyert and Xu 2012). Finally, other ill-defined and unspecified causes of mortality are identified as the 9th specific leading cause of death among Arizona's older adults in 2012, but this classification is not mentioned in the NCHS-defined grouped leading causes.

Focusing on the specific leading causes of death among Arizona's elderly in 2012, the mortality rates for each specific cause are strikingly higher for Arizona's older adults (age 85 and older). For example, the mortality rate for atherosclerotic heart disease is more than 13 times higher for Arizonans age 85 and older than for Arizonans age 65-74. Another example is for Alzheimer's disease and dementia, with mortality rates almost 55 and 59 times higher among Arizonans age 85 and over than for those age 65 – 74, respectively. The large discrepancies between age groups in mortality rates for these causes of death indicate the rapidly increasing toll that select chronic diseases take on adults among the oldest old.