

## 6. Conclusion

As the health and wellness of older Arizonans is the product of multiple components, developing informational resources to assist in the promotion of healthy aging of Arizona's older adults must also draw from various sources. This report has taken a holistic approach to defining health among Arizona's older adults, examining the role older adults play in the composition of our populace now and in the coming future, the demographic characteristics of our older population, as well as measures of health-related behaviors and the prevalence with common morbidities and chronic diseases. Hospital discharge data was used to assess how Arizona's older population utilize emergency and inpatient hospital care, and finally current patterns and recent trends in mortality were provided to understand the leading causes of death in Arizona's older population. Each of these data sources were analyzed with a focus on the coming population shift when Arizona's older adults will come to represent a greater proportion of the population.

As population projections highlighted, older adults will come to account for a greater proportion of our growing population in the future, making our ability to account for the health needs of this segment of the population even more critical. Arizona's older adults were shown to have health behaviors similar to comparably aged adults nationally, but differed from national estimates on some chronic diseases, specifically a lower prevalence of diabetes, a lower percentage of women with consistent mental and physical health issues, and a higher percentage of men reporting being diagnosed with skin cancer. Indicators of health care utilization showed that that rate of both emergency room and inpatient visits increased with age, with fractures being the most common first-listed diagnosis among Arizona's adults age 85 and over. While frailty may be somewhat inevitable as a result of the body's biological senescence with age, programs that encourage seniors to participate in physical activities and to make changes to their living environments to reduce the risk of falls can help reduce the number of fractures among aging adults.

The most exceptional trend observed in mortality among Arizona's older population is the increasing number of deaths related to cognitive aging. For both males and females, the mortality rate for Alzheimer's disease increased more than 20 percent and the mortality rate for dementia increased more than 40 percent from 2002 to 2012. Arizona's older females bear the greatest burden of memory-related diseases, with both Alzheimer's and dementia being in the top 3 causes of death for females 65 and over in 2012. As male longevity increases and mortality rates from heart disease and cancers continue to decrease, it can be expected that males will come to share increasingly in the proportion of all deaths due to memory-related disease.