

It again should be noted that the leading causes of death for males and females and subsequent trends were identified differently than other reports of mortality counts and rates. As shown in Tables 9 – 14, heart disease and cancer continue to be the overall leading causes of death for Arizonans age 65 and older, and this holds true for both males and females. Heart disease and cancer represent the greatest disease burden our older population must face, with memory-related diseases representing the causes of death that will claim the most rapidly increasing proportion of older Arizonans over the coming half-century.

Finally, the role of this report was to summarize the current and future state of health among Arizona's older adults. The information summarized herein represents only one step in the process of public health promotion. It is our hope that those tasked with the development of health policy to serve the needs of Arizona's seniors will take the results of this report into account when deciding how to effectively plan and fund social services, community programs, and health delivery systems. The great increases in human health and longevity in the early 20th Century were related largely to public health programs that focused on the primary prevention of disease. In the 21st Century, a large body of research is emerging that suggests a healthy diet, physical activity, social engagement, and intellectual and creative pursuits can help prevent the development of a host of morbidities among older adults, reduce the impact of these diseases once they have developed, and reduce the risk of mortality due to these chronic diseases (Ford et al. 2011; Michael et al. 1999; National Institute on Aging 2008; Savica and Petersen 2011). Health-related behaviors present a great opportunity for those developing and implementing health policy aimed at increasing the health and wellbeing of seniors, as programs that promote these activities among seniors are relatively inexpensive compared to the costs of treating chronic diseases within the health care system. With that being said, more fundamental determinants of health such as access to socioeconomic resources including education, solid job opportunities, income equality, and strong social ties will persistently reduce our ability to prevent the development of morbidities across the lifecourse. To most effectively prevent the development of chronic diseases and disabilities associated with aging, policy makers must focus both on the larger socioeconomic determinants of health as well as the development and maintenance of healthy habits and behaviors at the individual level.