

# Americans living longer, enjoying greater health and prosperity, but important disparities remain

27 March 2008

Average life expectancy continues to increase, and today's older Americans enjoy better health and financial security than any previous generation. However, rates of gain are inconsistent between the genders and across age brackets, income levels and racial and ethnic groups. Some critical disparities also exist between older Americans and older people in other industrialized countries.

These and other trends are reported in *Older Americans 2008: Key Indicators of Well-Being*, a unique, comprehensive look at aging in the United States from the Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics.

*Older Americans 2008*, the fourth chartbook prepared by the Forum since 2000, provides an updated, accessible compendium of indicators, drawn from the most reliable official statistics about the well-being of Americans primarily age 65 and over. The indicators are categorized into five broad areas—population, economics, health status, health risks and behaviors and health care. The 160-page report contains data on 38 key indicators—and a one-time special feature on health literacy.

The Forum—a consortium representing 15 agencies with responsibilities for Federal data collection or aging programs—collects, interprets and updates these data and makes them available to government agencies, policymakers, the media and the public.

“This report comes at a critical time,” according to Edward Sondik, Ph.D., director, National Center for Health Statistics. “As the baby boomers age and America's older population grows larger and more diverse, community leaders, policymakers and researchers have an even greater need for reliable data to understand where older Americans stand today and what they may face tomorrow.”

“The ‘greatest generation’ made enormous gains in health and financial security, although the gains were not shared equally,” says Richard Suzman, Ph.D., director of the Behavioral and Social Research Program at the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health. “We'll be tracking their children, those just reaching their 60s, to see whether those gains can be sustained or even improved.” Suzman cautions that there could be problems, however. For example, he notes that increased rates of obesity among today's middle-aged could threaten the health of these adults as they age.

“The sheer size of the baby boom cohorts is certain to affect our health, long-term care and pension systems,” says Benjamin E. Sasse, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Department of Health and Human Services. “As we look ahead, it is imperative that we collect and analyze quality data to help policymakers plan for the future of these programs so important to aging Americans.”

Source: National Institute on Aging

APA citation: Americans living longer, enjoying greater health and prosperity, but important disparities remain (2008, March 27) retrieved 21 September 2019 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-03-americans-longer-greater-health-prosperity.html>

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