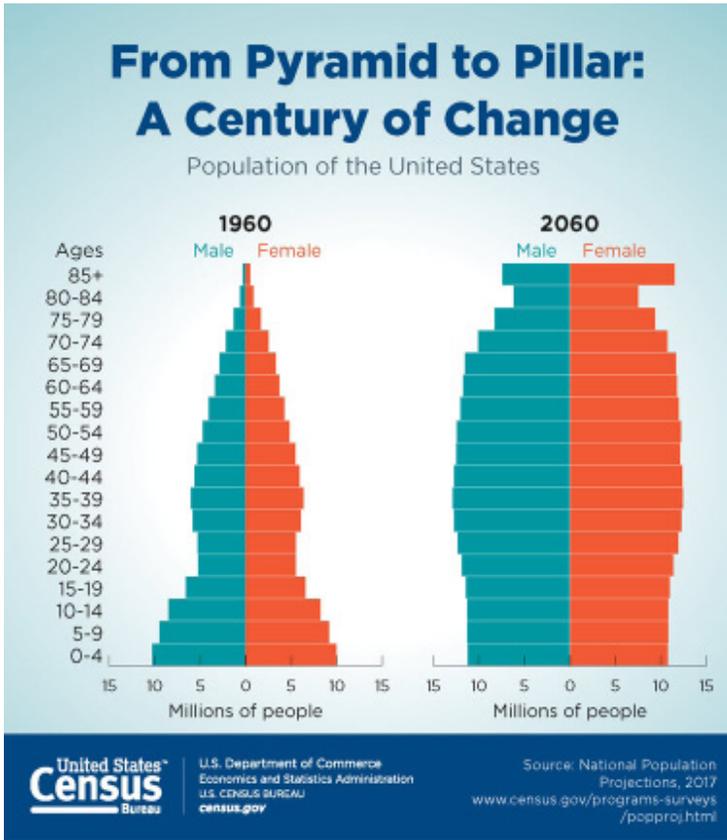


Older Adult Health: At a Glance

An overview for health centers

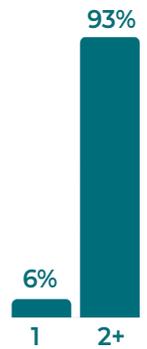


It is critically important that **health centers** are prepared to provide care to an older adult population that is growing at an unprecedented rate.

The U.S. Census Bureau projects the population of adults age 65 and older will outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history by 2034. By 2060, nearly one in four Americans will be 65 years and older.¹

The number of older adults served at health centers has grown from 1.7 million (2014) to 2.6 million (2018).^{2,3}

Many older Americans live with multiple chronic conditions. According to the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project National Inpatient Sample, more than 90% of older adults manage two or more conditions that require ongoing care or limit activities of daily living.⁴



Number of Chronic Conditions Among Older Adults

14.3 million adults over the age of 65 have **diabetes**⁵ and 24.2 million have **prediabetes**.⁶ Older adults also often have one or more chronic conditions that impact diabetes management.⁷



Health centers can assist older adults through diabetes screening, education on prevention strategies, management of multiple chronic conditions, and tailoring treatment plans.

One in four older adults experience a behavioral health problem, such as **depression, anxiety, or substance use disorder**.⁸ Adults aged 65+ also reported that they rarely or never received the social and emotional support they need.⁹ Among all races, men age 75 years or older have the highest suicide rate of any age group at about 40 deaths per 100,000 population.¹⁰ Additionally, almost 20% of older adults **misuse alcohol, over-the-counter medicines, and prescription drugs**, often unintentionally.¹¹

Mental health professionals at health centers play an important role in providing patient education, managing prescriptions, and connecting older adults to social support in their community.



Health centers are at the forefront of responding to older adult health care needs, including diabetes, oral health, substance use and opioid use, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) treatment and prevention, and behavioral health.

68% of older adults have **gum disease**, and nearly 20% have lost all of their teeth.¹² A common cause of cavities and other oral health concerns in older adults is xerostomia (**dry mouth**), which can occur from taking multiple medications or from a comorbid condition like diabetes.¹³ Among patients over 65 years old, at least 30% experience dry mouth.¹⁴ Older adults with dentures, especially ill-fitting ones, are more likely to consume fewer fruits, vegetables, and a lower variety of foods in their diet.¹⁵

Health centers can help older adults maintain or improve their oral health through appropriate dental treatment and routine medication management.

Chronic conditions can increase the risk of side effects from drug interactions for **older adults living with HIV**. Although many HIV risk factors are the same for adults of any age, older adults are less likely to get tested. Additionally, nearly half of the people in the U.S. living with diagnosed HIV are age 50 and older.¹⁶ Nearly 75% of people with HIV who report a history of injection drug use also are infected with hepatitis C virus (HCV),¹⁷ highlighting the need for HCV screening among those with HIV.

Health centers help manage older adults' HIV treatment regimens, discuss prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections, and provide inclusive care and support for older adults who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQIA+).



The National Center for Equitable Care for Elders provides innovative and culturally competent models of care, interprofessional training and educational resources, and technical assistance to health care professionals in health centers who provide care to the increasingly vulnerable population of older adults. Visit us online at:

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