



This FAQ is an update to the 2003 *FAQ on the Aging and Elderly Population* and includes information on adults 65 and older in Travis County.

Highlights

In our community, unmet needs among older adults include:

- Safe, affordable and appropriate housing options
- Household maintenance that requires semi-professional or professional knowledge and skills
- Assistance with and prevention of isolation, loneliness, and depression
- Transportation options
- Dental care
- Professional and better paid caregivers in the workforce
- Increased support programs (education, training, respite) for volunteer family caregivers
- Assistance with life planning, service coordination, the navigation of complex systems, like the healthcare system and Medicaid
- Protection against abuse, exploitation, and neglect
- Volunteers at nonprofit agencies serving the elderly

These needs are likely to increase as the population of older adults soars in the coming years.

Q: How many older adults live in Travis County, and what do they look like?

About 59,447 adults aged 65 years and older live in Travis County. They make up 7% of the total population. Fifty-seven percent of older adults are women; 72% are Anglo.¹ Among older adults living in households, some 4,695 are living below the poverty level.²

Q: Why focus on older adults?

The aging of the population is one of the most important demographic trends affecting Travis County. By 2040, older adults are expected to make up 20% of the county’s population (see Chart “Projected Population”).

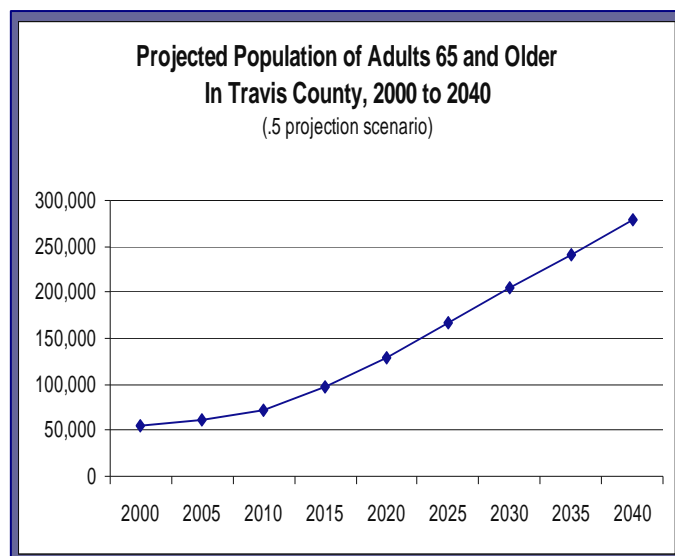
The older-adult population will also become more diverse, and needs will change as the racial/ethnic make-up of the population changes. While Whites currently make up about 72% of all older adults, minority populations, especially the Hispanic population, are growing rapidly. By 2040, minorities will constitute about half of all older Texans. Hispanics and African Americans tend to be less educated and have lower household incomes than Whites.³

Race/Ethnicity Among Adults 65 and Older in Travis County, 2005	
Anglo	72%
Hispanic	15%
Black	9%
Other	4%
Total	100%

Facts And Questions about the Aging and Elderly Population

Q: Why pay attention to gender?

The older population is made up of more women than men. In general these women are not as well off as their male counterparts. Many older women, especially those over 75, are likely to be widowed, live alone, and suffer disproportionately from chronic diseases and disabilities. Nationally, nearly 30% of older non-married women are either poor or near-poor. While the majority of older men have spouses to rely on for assistance, specifically when their health fails, most older women do not. Because women tend to live longer than men, long-term care will remain largely a women's issue. About 75% of nursing home residents are women.⁴



Q: Is there unmet need for affordable and appropriate housing?

Yes, and it is great. Austin has the highest housing costs for an urban area in Texas, and Travis County has the highest rental rates in the state. In 2006, Austin ranked fifth in the nation for foreclosures: one foreclosure for every 142 households—more than twice the national average.

The majority of older persons want to continue to live in their own homes. However, rising property taxes and utility costs make this difficult on a fixed income. Upkeep and repairs become difficult to accomplish. In Travis County, 7 percent of adults 65 and older said that their homes are in need of substantial repair.⁵ New apartments designed for seniors are not affordable for persons who have low, fixed incomes. All of the affordable senior complexes, including Family Eldercare's Lyon's Gardens, have two to three year waiting lists.

Q: Is loneliness and isolation a problem for the community's elders?

Yes, 21% of older adults in Travis County say that loneliness is a problem for them. Five percent find it physically difficult to leave their house or apartment. Six percent have no one to turn to for understanding or advice. About 2,400 older adults, or 4%, said that in the past year they have been "unable to perform normal daily activities for at least two weeks due to feeling overwhelmed or emotionally drained."⁶ Adults aged 65 and older have higher suicide rates than any other age group in Travis County. Older men have much higher suicide rates than older women.⁷

Because of the isolation imposed by chronic illness and physical limitations, the homebound elderly are especially at risk for loneliness and depression.⁸ According to case managers at Meals on Wheels and More, about 75% of their case-managed homebound clients suffer from mild to moderate depression.⁹ The rapid growth of the older-adult population is likely to increase the number of homebound adults who require support services for their mental health needs.

Q: Do abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older adults take place in our community?

Yes, and older people, particularly women, are vulnerable when they are isolated and when they live with a family member or caregiver.¹⁰ In 2006, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services estimated 754 confirmed cases of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of adults 65 and older in Travis County.

Facts And Questions about the Aging and Elderly Population

Q: What are some of the transportation needs among older adults?

Older adults need access to transportation to get to the doctor and the grocery store. They also need it to stay connected to their community—their church, library, and senior center. However, transportation is a challenge for many older adults, especially the very old who may need door-to-door or through-the-door transportation assistance. In Travis County, about 2,400 older adults (4%) sometimes lack transportation to get somewhere, like necessary errands, doctor appointments, or social activities.¹¹

Access to alternative modes of transportation must be increased through strategic funding and greater recruitment of volunteers. Currently, older adults in Travis County can call 211. The 211 Call Center directs clients and caregivers to fixed-route bus service, para-transit programs, and volunteer driver programs. Faith in Action Caregivers, Meals on Wheels and More's Medi-Wheels program, and Austin Groups for the Elderly provided over 31,000 rides to doctors' appointments and other necessary errands in 2006.

Q: Do some older adults in our community go without dental care because they can not afford it?

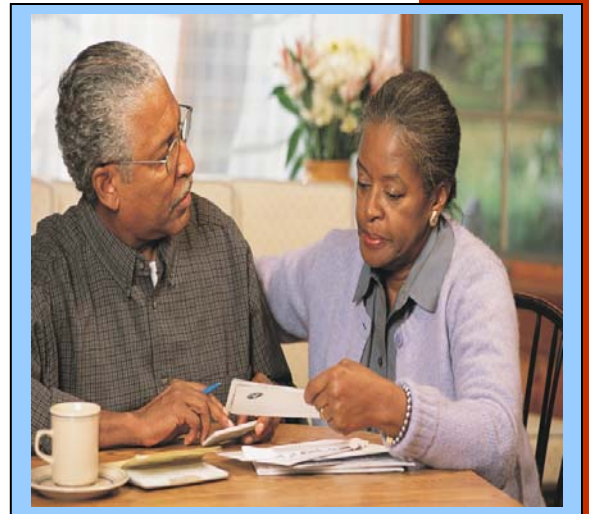
Yes. Medicare does not generally cover dental care, and many older adults can not afford to pay cash for care. Older adults pay more out of pocket for dental services than any other age group. While Americans paid out of pocket for one-half of all dental care expenses in 2000, people aged 65 and older paid more than three-quarters (an average of \$400) of their dental expenses.¹²

About 6,000 older adults (10%) in Travis County said that they needed dental care during the past year but could not get it due to cost or other access issues.¹³ Barriers to oral healthcare can worsen other aspects of a person's health. Poor dental hygiene and lack of care can contribute to cardiovascular diseases and diabetes.

Q: In the coming years, who will care for our frail older adults?

In the U.S., about half of adults age 55 to 64 provide care to family members, compared with 38 percent of those aged 65 to 74 and 19 percent of those aged 75 and older. Spouse helpers average 1,443 hours of family care a year, compared with 541 hours for parent caregivers and 474 hours for grandchild caregivers.

Despite these hours of service, the “care gap” between those needing care and those available to care for them continues to widen. The increased need for family or paid caregivers to assist older adults with household and personal tasks has been brought about by several factors. The first is the growing population of older adults. Second, the population of the traditional caregiving workforce (women aged 25 to 44) is not growing as fast as the older population. Third, low salaries and lack of benefits for caregiver work make it difficult to attract dependable caregivers for the elderly and disabled. More support programs are also needed for volunteer family caregivers. Support programs include education and training, respite programs, and assistance with planning.¹⁴



Facts And Questions about the Aging and Elderly Population

Q: What can I do to help?

- Volunteer for an organization that serves older adults. For more information,
 - Call 472-6267, Hands on Central Texas.
 - If you are 55 or older, you can call 854-RSVP (7787), RSVP Travis County.
 - Visit <http://www.agingervicescouncil.org/> and click on “Volunteer.”
- Reach out to your older adult neighbors who may be isolated and lonely or who may need assistance with household chores or getting groceries.
- Report suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of elders. Contact the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services’ Abuse Hotline (1-800-252-5400) or its secure Website (www.txabusehotline.org).

Additional information:

- To obtain a copy of this document or any other CAN report, go to www.caction.org. Copies are available at the CAN office, 1111 W. 6th St., Ste B220, Austin, TX 78703.
- Specific questions about the contents of this FAQ? Please contact the St. David’s Community Health Foundation, lisa@sdchf.org.
- For information related to aging services in Travis County, please visit the website of the Aging Services Council: <http://www.agingervicescouncil.org/>.

¹ Texas State Data Center, <http://txsdc.utsa.edu/tpepp/txpopest.php>.

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

³ Population Estimates and Projections Program, Texas State Data Center, Office of the Demographer, Institute for Demographic and Socioeconomic Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio. Available: <http://txsdc.utsa.edu/tpepp/txpopest.php>.

⁴ Texas Demographics: Older Adults in Texas, Texas Department on Aging, Office of Aging Policy and Information, Austin, Texas, April 2003. Karamcheva, Nadia, and Alicia H. Munnell. *Why are Widows so Poor?* July 2007, Number 7-9. Center for Retirement Research at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Mass. Available: http://crr.bc.edu/images/stories/Briefs/ib_7-9.pdf. August 2007.

⁵ Data analysis, 2005 survey of older adults in Travis County, Aging Services Council and St. David’s Community Health Foundation, Austin, Texas.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Suicide Death Rates and Frequencies for Travis County by Age for Males and Females for 1999-2004. Center for Health Statistics, Texas Department of State Health Services. Available: <http://soupfin.tdh.state.tx.us/death10.htm>. August 2007.

⁸ Choi, Namkee & G. McDougall. 2007. “Comparison of Depressive Symptoms between Homebound Older Adults and Ambulatory Older Adults,” *Aging & Mental Health*, 11, pp. 310-322.

⁹ Namkee Choi, Ph.D., personal communication, St. David’s Community Health Foundation, June 28, 2007.

¹⁰ National Center on Elder Abuse. *Domestic Abuse in Later Life: Victims*. Available: <http://www.elderabusecenter.org/pdf/research/victims.pdf>. September 2007. Teaster, Pamela, et al.

The 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services: Abuse of Adults 60 years of Age and Older, prepared for the National Center on Elder Abuse. Available: http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/NCEARoot/Main_Site/pdf/2-14-06%20FINAL%2060+REPORT.pdf. September 2007.

¹¹ Data analysis, 2005 survey of older adults in Travis County, Aging Services Council and St. David’s Community Health Foundation, Austin, Texas.

¹² Elderly Pay More out of Pocket for Dental Services Than Any Other Age Group. Press Release, April 28, 2004. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD. Available: <http://www.ahrq.gov/news/press/pr2004/eldentpr.htm>. June 29, 2007.

¹³ Data analysis, 2005 survey of older adults in Travis County, Aging Services Council and St. David’s Community Health Foundation, Austin, Texas.

¹⁴ “Golden Years are Active Years, Study Shows,” July 28, 2005. The Urban Institute, Washington DC. Available: <http://www.urban.org/publications/900826.html>

CAN Partners: Austin Area Human Services Association ~ Austin Area Interreligious Ministries ~ Austin Area Research Organization
Austin Independent School District ~ Austin Travis County MHMR Center ~ Capital Metro ~ City of Austin
Community Justice Center ~ Greater Austin Chamber ~ Health Partnership 2010 / Indigent Care Collaboration
Higher Education Coalition ~ Travis County ~ Travis County Healthcare District ~ United Way Capital Area ~ WorkSource

