**Aging Advances**

An aging workforce and population will change the United States and other developed nations, impacting the workplace, government budgets, policy, family life, and more.

**How It’s Developing**

Since 1950, the United States population aged 65 and older has been increasing (as a percentage of the total population) from 8.1% in 1950 to 12.8% in 2009 – and could increase further to 20.2% by 2050.[[1](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)] Not only would that result in 1 in 5 Americans being aged 65 or older, but the oldest old, those aged 80 and above, could be the most populous age group – 32.5 million persons or 7.4% of the entire US population.[[2](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)] By 2060, the traditional “age pyramid,” where the young form a base with a larger percentage of the population and the oldest form a point at the top with a smaller percentage, could become a rectangle. [[3](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)]

Life expectancy – a result of scientific advances, improved public health and sanitation, better access to health care, and increased education – has risen an average of three month with each passing year in the 20th Century, resulting in a current life expectancy of 79 years and a potential life expectancy of 88 years by 2050. [[4](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)] Along with improvement in health and medicine, technology may also play a significant role in allowing individuals to age in place, especially as inventors and companies become interested in a larger aging population with greater financial resources. [[5](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)] Longevity, even if quality of life is improved alongside longevity, will increase the demand for quality healthcare and could burden social benefit programs like Medicare.

As life expectancy increases, individuals are spending more time in retirement – the typical American now spends 22% of their life in retirement versus 17% in 1940. [[6](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)] Increased time in retirement provides individuals with additional opportunities for leisure, volunteering, learning, or even secondary or alternative careers. At the same time, increased time in retirement will require more careful financial planning or additional financial support and will place burdens on benefit programs from Social Security to state and non-profit sponsored programs like Meals on Wheels or rideshares.

**Why It Matters**

An increasing life expectancy will require adequate retirement income and access to health care for aging adults. [[7](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)] Adults may continue to work past traditional retirement ages. For libraries, this could mean a change in the profile of their users, especially in academic, medical and special libraries, and in the profile of librarians and library professionals.

An aging population will challenge governments to balance support for pensions against funding for programs that benefit all citizens and/or younger citizens. [[8](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)] Younger populations’ interest in investments in education, transportation, and infrastructure may be challenged by the interests of older adults. [[9](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)]

As the population of older adults becomes a more dominant force, politics and elections could come to be dominated by the old, shaping the government to align with their interests and needs. [[10](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)]

Younger generations may increasingly be called upon to support, through time or money, older family members. Again, this could shape the profile of library users as well as the library workforce.

Increased time in retirement could result in demand for leisure activities to fill older adults’ time, deeper pools of volunteer talent, or need for new community and gathering spaces. Large populations of older adults may shape the direction of collections (leisure reading, large print), programs (Medicaid support, technology instruction), and services (book delivery, deposit collections). Retired adults may find their way back into the workforce or campuses, potentially changing the user population for academic or special libraries. [[11](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)]

Large populations of older adults retiring in place or moving to existing older adult communities will significantly influence the economies of communities, increasing demand for health care workers, the food service industry, and even new retailers. [[12](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/aging#Notes and Resources)]

**Notes and Resources**

[1] “The Changing Demographic Profile of the United States.” Laura B. Shrestha and Elayne J. Heisler. Congressional Research Service. 2011. Available from <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32701.pdf>.

[2] “The Changing Demographic Profile of the United States.” Laura B. Shrestha and Elayne J. Heisler. Congressional Research Service. 2011. Available from <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32701.pdf>.

[3] “The Next America.” Paul Taylor. Pew Research Center. April 10, 2014. Available from <http://www.pewresearch.org/next-america/#Two-Dramas-in-Slow-Motion>.

[4] “What Happens When We All Live to 100?” Greg Easterbrook. *The Atlantic*. September 17, 2014. Available from[http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/09/what-happens-when-we...](http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/09/what-happens-when-we-all-live-to-100/379338/).

[5] "White House: We Need More Tech to Handle an Aging America." Issie Lapowsky. *Wired*. July 13, 2015. Available from<http://www.wired.com/2015/07/white-house-aging-honor/>

[6] “What Happens When We All Live to 100?” Greg Easterbrook. *The Atlantic*. September 17, 2014. Available from[http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/09/what-happens-when-we...](http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/09/what-happens-when-we-all-live-to-100/379338/).

[7] “Trends Report: Snapshots of a Turbulent World” [Discussion Draft of August 19, 2014]. American Library Association. Policy Revolution! Initiative. 2014. Available from [http://www.districtdispatch.org/2014/08/understanding-turbulent-world-de...](http://www.districtdispatch.org/2014/08/understanding-turbulent-world-develop-library-policy-agenda/).

[8] “Trends Report: Snapshots of a Turbulent World” [Discussion Draft of August 19, 2014]. American Library Association. Policy Revolution! Initiative. 2014. Available from [http://www.districtdispatch.org/2014/08/understanding-turbulent-world-de...](http://www.districtdispatch.org/2014/08/understanding-turbulent-world-develop-library-policy-agenda/).

[9] “Florida’s ‘Gray Belt’ a Glimpse at Nation’s Future.” Mike Schneider. *The Associated Press*. September 15, 2014. Available from <http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_FLORIDAS_GRAY_FUTURE>.

[10] “What Happens When We All Live to 100?” Greg Easterbrook. *The Atlantic*. September 17, 2014. Available from[http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/09/what-happens-when-we...](http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/09/what-happens-when-we-all-live-to-100/379338/).

[11] “What Happens When We All Live to 100?” Greg Easterbrook. *The Atlantic*. September 17, 2014. Available from[http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/09/what-happens-when-we...](http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/09/what-happens-when-we-all-live-to-100/379338/).

[12] “Florida’s ‘Gray Belt’ a Glimpse at Nation’s Future.” Mike Schneider. *The Associated Press*. September 15, 2014. Available from <http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_FLORIDAS_GRAY_FUTURE>.