

Senior Health

Public Health Brief



Christina Claypool, Health Policy Analyst



Healthy Aging

The percentage of the United States' population that is 65 years or older is gradually increasing, reaching 15% in 2016, with a projected rise to 25% or 98 million in 2060.¹ Maryland and Harford County's percentages of elderly, comparable to the United States', are expected to have similar increases. Aging brings on increased risk for chronic illnesses such as type 2 diabetes, arthritis, and cancer. The risk for Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia also increases with age.

MARYLAND VITAL STATISTICS ANNUAL REPORT, 2018²

	Harford	Maryland
Total Population	253,956	5,042,718
65 Years and Older	41,128	931,136
% 65 Years and Older	16%	15%

Focusing on preventive measures can help older adults to live longer and healthier lives. Preventing chronic illness involves staying up to date with doctors' appointments, health screenings for diseases such as hypertension and cancer, maintaining a healthy weight, consuming a healthy diet and staying physically active. Better physical function can help reduce the risk of falls and fall-related injuries, which are more frequent in older adults.

BEHAVIORAL RISK FACTOR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM DATA - 2018³

	Harford	Maryland
Fell in the past 12 months (45+) (age-adjusted)	22.4%	22.7%
Fall resulted in injury, past 12 months (45+) (age-adjusted)	7.2%	8.7%



MARYLAND DATA HIGHLIGHTS 2019⁴

- Obesity has increased from 26.2% to 31.2% in the past 5 years for adults 65 years and older.
- In the past six years, depression increased from 9.2% to 14.2% in adults 65 years and older.
- In the past four years, ICU use in the last six months of life decreased 14% from 12.5% to 10.7% of decedents aged 65 years and older.

Geriatricians⁴

Geriatricians are medical doctors trained to meet the needs of adults aged 65 and older such as:

- Management of several medications at the same time to prevent drug interactions;
- Management of multiple chronic conditions;
- Adhering to unique pharmaceutical guidelines established for older adults;
- Palliative and end life of care; and
- Diseases of the elderly such as dementia.

As of 2017, there were only 7,279 geriatricians in the United States. Since baby boomers are aging and life expectancy increasing, 30,000 geriatricians will be needed by 2030, with a geriatrician shortfall anticipated. In 2019, Maryland had 21.7 family medicine and internal medicine geriatricians per 100,000 population ages 65 and older compared to 14.2 per 100,000 in the United States. However, Maryland is estimated to need 39.6% more geriatricians to serve its aging population.

Spotlight: Coronavirus and Seniors

Adults 65 and over are at a higher risk for developing severe complications from COVID-19 because seniors typically have weaker immune systems and are also more likely to have chronic illnesses, which can lead to complications of COVID-19. According to the CDC's March 27 Morbidity and Mortality Report, 80% of the deaths of patients diagnosed with COVID-19 since February 12 occurred among adults aged 65 years or older with the highest percentage of severe outcomes among persons aged 85 years or older.⁵ These figures are similar to early data reported for China, which indicated that the highest fatality rate was among the elderly (60 and older). In order to avoid infection, seniors should stay home as much as possible, develop a care plan, maintain at least a 30-day supply of medications and have adequate non-perishable foods on hand.

Sources:

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/factsheets/promoting-health-for-older-adults.htm>
2. https://health.maryland.gov/vsa/Documents/Reports%20and%20Data/Annual%20Reports/2018annual_rev3.ppt
3. <https://ibis.health.maryland.gov/query/selection/brfss/BRFSSSelection.html>
4. https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/senior/measure/geriatrician_sr/state/MD
5. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6912e2.htm?s_cid=mm6912e2_w