

# Older Adults

## Value Statement

Older adults are valuable members of our community. Older adults deserve to live in vibrant, elder-friendly communities that are prepared to support and prolong independent living, a positive outlook on life and a connection to others and the community, good physical and mental health.

## Problem Statement

Older adults are marginalized in our culture, which emphasizes youth and mobility. The most common concerns of older adults include fear of social isolation, depression, financial problems, and declining physical health.

In 2008, 44,645 older adults 60+ resided in Boulder County (State Demographers Office, 2008). Boulder County is aging faster than the rest of Colorado; the 60+ population is expected to double by 2020 and triple by 2030 from 2000. The Boulder County Aging Services Division estimates that Boulder County older adults (60+) will grow 81% between 2000 and 2015; and Boulder County will be home to 56,455 older adults. “A larger number of independent older adults will be available to contribute to the community as volunteers” and “an increasing number of frail and disabled older adults will need services”, according to their report, entitled “*The Status of Older Adults in Boulder County 2004*”.

In the year 2000, there were over half a million adults over age 60 living in Colorado. The Denver Metro area accounts for 46% of the state's population of older adults. The older adult population is expected to grow 51% by 2012 in Colorado; by contrast, the remainder of the population is expected to grow by 19%. The increased demand for services will substantially amplify by 2010 when the first baby boomers turn 65. With the imminent threat of Medicare's decline, we must take action.

Seventeen percent of persons over age 65 have incomes below 150% of the poverty level and roughly one in four below 200%. Women represent 70% of people 85 and over. Very low-incomes characterize this vulnerable group. Poverty is substantially more prevalent among Hispanic, Black and American Indian older adults. Three-fourths of minority older adults speak a language other than English at home, creating increased obstacles in accessing services.

The 2000 Census found that 40% of older adults in Colorado reported having one or more sensory, physical, mental, or self-care disabilities.

Those age 60-74 are often considered “young-old” where the ability to live independently is common. Those over age 75 are often considered “old-old” and are more likely to require some form of assistance to continue to live independently. More than half of older adults living alone are age 75 and older. Less than 5% of older adults live nursing homes. This leaves 95% of independent living elders who may require services that support and prolong independent living opportunities.

Recent data indicates that the average monthly cost of a nursing home stay for one older adult in Colorado is \$4,375. Essential services to support continued independent living for one older adult is estimated to be between \$284 (for a older adult with heavy family involvement) to \$2,570 (for a older adult with minimal support network). Even the most expensive application of services to sustain independent living for a high-risk older adult is far less than the cost of nursing home care.

The contributions of older adults to their community are invaluable. Forty percent of older adults participate in volunteer work. The value of unpaid contributions by older adults in the state of Colorado is over \$1.6 billion annually. The growth of this population and associated higher voting rates will amplify their voices in the political arena.

The demands on infrastructure services to support this growing demographic will be substantial. The combination of increasing growth in the number of older adults and the expected rises in the cost of delivering services is projected to increase the cost of service provision by 67% from 2004 to the year 2012. Governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations serving older adults are not prepared to handle the drastic changes in demographics for older adults and the resulting demand for services.

Older Coloradoan Funds that support home and community based services was increased to \$ 8 million annually in 2008. These funds allow many older Coloradoans to age in their homes with dignity by providing essential services such as Meals on Wheels, transportation and ombudsman services.

### **Policy Statement**

The HSA advocates for local, state and federal funding to support a coordinated policy for older adults that:

Addresses Basic Needs, including: appropriate and affordable housing; safe, nonviolent life at home and in the community; adequate nutrition.

Optimizes Physical and Mental Health and Well Being, including: promotion and support of healthy behaviors; adult protection, prevention of abuse/neglect; community activities to enhance well-being; access to preventive health services, including affordable prescription medications, Spanish language services to enhance access to services; access to medical, social, and palliative services.

Promotion of Social and Civic Engagement through: meaningful connections with family, neighbors and friends; active engagement in community life; opportunities for meaningful volunteer and paid work; and creating a community-wide priority for aging issues.

Maximization of independence for frail and disabled individuals through: resources that are accessible and affordable including transportation, in-home support services and community involvement.