Projected Population by Age: Residents of Massachusetts, 2010 - 2030

Hayley Gravette  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, hayley.gravette001@umb.edu*

Jiyoung Lyu  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, jiyoung.lyu001@umb.edu*

Bernard A. Steinman  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, bernard.steinman@umb.edu*

Jan Mutchler  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, jan.mutchler@umb.edu*

Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging, University of Massachusetts Boston

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Projected Population Growth in Massachusetts

Over the next 20 years, the total population of Massachusetts is projected to grow by about 6%, from 6.6 million to 7.0 million people. Between 2010 and 2030, the growth of the state’s population is expected to occur almost entirely among older adults. In fact, the group of individuals 65 years and older is expected to grow by 61%.

Figure 1 shows the state’s projected population growth by age group. Of all groups the most growth is expected among persons aged 65 to 84 (66.7%). The number of individuals 85 and over will also grow dramatically, by 34.2%. Very little growth is expected among those under age 45. A decrease in absolute numbers is expected among persons aged 45 to 64. In 2010, this group consisted of today’s Baby Boomers, the youngest of whom will reach retirement age by 2030. The projected increase in the numbers of persons 85 and older can be accounted for, in part, by increased life expectancies and the aging of today’s “young-old” population.

The generation known as the “Baby Boomers”—an exceptionally large birth cohort born between 1946 and 1964—has been likened to a “pig in a python” because of its size and impact on social structures and institutions over time. In the next 20 years, the need for services targeting older Massachusetts residents will grow, as Baby Boomers begin to reach retirement age. This shift in demographic composition will create new challenges for private and public programs designed for older people.

Figure 2 shows the uneven growth that will reshape the age distribution within Massachusetts. In 2010, the population of persons aged 65 and over made up approximately 14% of the state’s total population. By 2030, more than 1 in 5 (21%) of the state’s residents will be in this age group.

Similarly, a growing share of the older population will be among the oldest-old (those age 85 and older), representing nearly 212,000 individuals, or about 3% of the state’s total population. In the past, this segment of the older population has been at the greatest risk for acquiring chronic disease and disability, predicting greater future demand for services that enhance health and enable independence among the Commonwealth’s older residents.

Sources: American Community Survey, 2000 and 2010; *U.S. Census, Interim Projections, 2005