

# OREGON'S NEW AGE STRUCTURE

Jessie F. Richardson Foundation

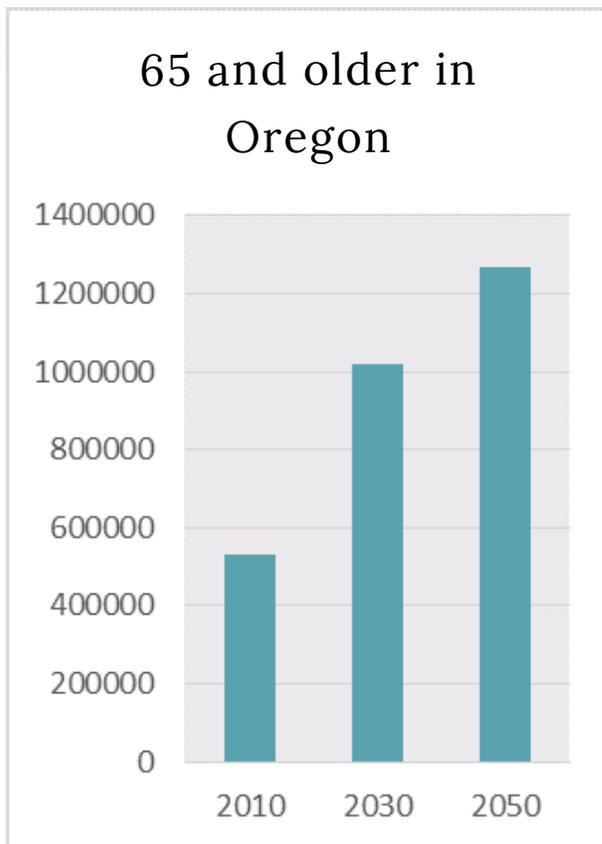
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# OREGON? OR FLORIDA?

## THE CHANGING AGE STRUCTURE OF OREGON NOW UNDERWAY IS MORE THAN A WAVE

You might think that the “silver tsunami” of Baby Boomers now entering retirement will be a passing phenomenon, a demographic bulge we can just ride out as it crests and recedes. You might think that we need only cope with a temporary distortion of the American age structure, then let things go back to normal. Yet data from Oregon’s Office of Economic Analysis suggest that instead of a crashing and subsiding wave, Boomers are ushering in a permanent rise in the numbers of older adults in Oregon. Instead of a wave, the water level is rising. Permanently.

### TOTAL OREGONIANS 65+ IS RAPIDLY GROWING



Source: Forecasts of Oregon's County Populations by Age and Sex, 2010 - 2050  
Prepared by Office of Economic Analysis, Department of Administrative Services,  
State of Oregon



# HOW CAN THIS BE?

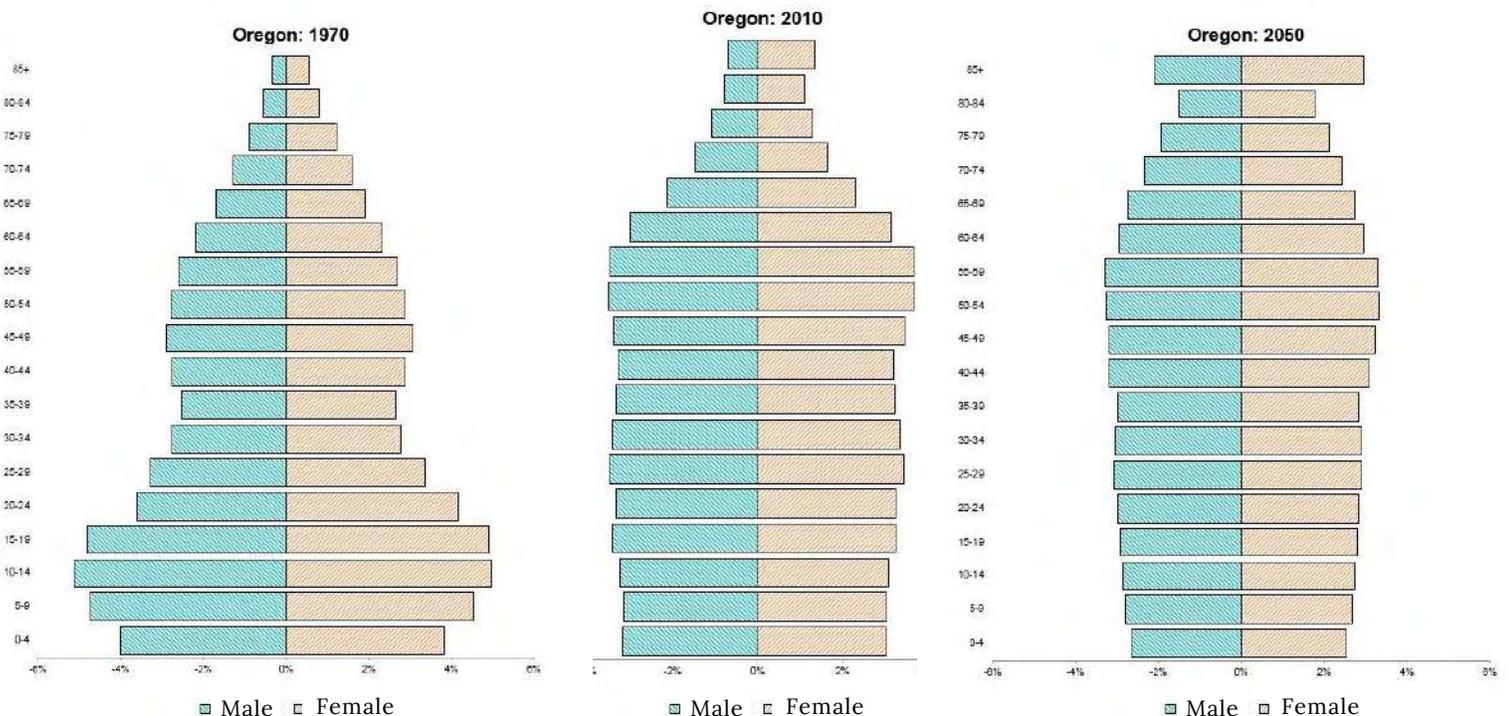
The generations coming up in the shadow of Boomers are far smaller, right? A close look at the numbers says otherwise—and shows that Oregon faces an urgent challenge: we must rethink how all of us—as individuals, families, communities and society—prepare for a new era of aging.

Twelve years from today, by 2030, the number of Oregonians 65+ is projected to swell to over 1,000,000. Seniors will then compose 21% of Oregon’s population up from 14% in 2010. And these numbers and percentages will continue to rise. By 2050, while Oregon’s total population is projected to increase 46% from 2010 numbers, the percentage of Oregonians 65 and older will increase by 138%. Far from a single, passing event, changes in the age structure of the future will be permanent.



## WE ARE GROWING TOP-HEAVY

*The Age Structure Pyramid we think as normal will be turned upside down. And our systems are built for a population more like Oregon in 1970.*



Source: United States Census Bureau's Decennial Census Series  
 Source: Forecasts of Oregon's County Populations by Age and Sex, 2010 - 2050  
 Prepared by Office of Economic Analysis, Department of Administrative Services, State of Oregon

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

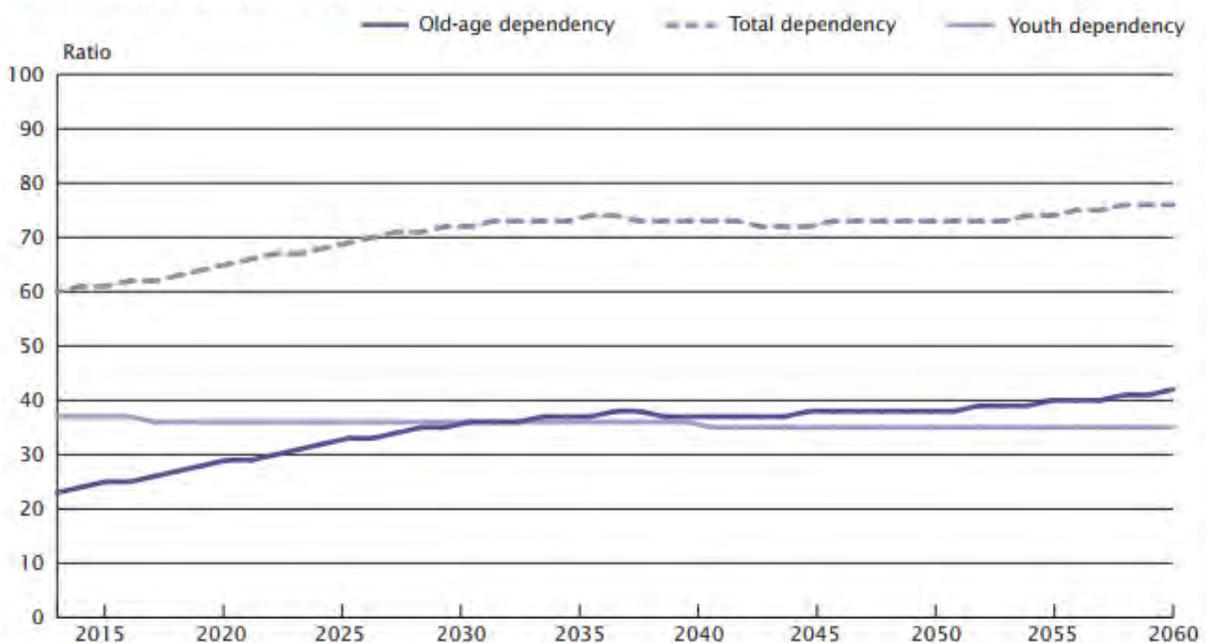
## AN ENDURING SHIFT

What does this shift mean? Demographers point to the crucial “dependency ratios” to help sort out policy and budgeting implications of population shifts. The notion is to compare the numbers of nonworking younger and older generations—the dependents—to the numbers of people in the middle whose taxes and Social Security payments support the others. Thus, the dependency ratio is simply the number of working age people compared to the numbers of nonworking younger and older people. By 2030, the number of citizens over age 65 will be equal to the number of Americans under age 18; in the following years they will increasingly outnumber young citizens. The inevitable result will be changes from a child-centric society to one more adult-centric.



This dramatic and enduring shift in aging structure is the culmination of the long-term decline in birth rates, plummeting from nearly 4.0 children per family after World War II to just 2.0 today. At the same time, life expectancy is rising. Boomers turning 65 today can expect to live an additional 21 years for women and 18 years for men. This adds two extra years of life expectancy beyond those who turned 65 in 2000.

Figure 6.  
DEPENDENCY RATIOS: 2014 TO 2060



Note: Old-age dependency = (Population aged 65 and over/Population aged 18 to 64)\*100.  
Youth dependency = (Population under 18/Population aged 18 to 64)\*100.  
Total dependency = ((Population aged 65 and over + Population under 18)/Population aged 18 to 64)\*100.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 National Projections.



## WILL WE BECOME WISER BEFORE WE GET OLDER?

We are on the front end of a long-term restructuring of society of which the present Boomer generation is only the beginning. The reality is that the population is aging in the United States and Oregon.

As a society, we still need to support the maturation of younger people with schools, stable environments and higher education. At the same time, a greater number of older citizens will be relying on Social Security and Medicare over their longer lives. These dynamics create fundamental risk to stability. For example, the benefits to older people will receive ever greater scrutiny and people may need to stay on the job longer.

For individuals, longer life may bring more opportunities for personal growth and development, more chances to contribute to family, community and the economy. At the same time, this blessing of extended years raises challenges related to maintaining health and financial security.

Given the lag time in making social and cultural changes, it is urgent that we move quickly. The Oregon age population pyramids demonstrate these shifts are already underway.

Fortunately, many of the ways in which we view older age are not preordained facts. Rather, they are nearly invisible concepts developed by the culture and by policy makers. Thus we have the “declining” years, the “role-less role,” notions which reinforce a picture of older adults as frail, passive, non-productive takers.

Yet the idea of “retirement” only became a commonly held concept within the past century. Today, the term, “Golden Years,” suggests a life of leisure as a consolation prize rather than an age of peak performance and wisdom.

Will Boomers and successive cohorts accept these stereotypes as permanent? Not likely. Just as they have changed everything before, Boomers will redefine and reconstruct what it means to enter this stage of life. Joseph F. Coughlin, Founder and Director of the MIT AgeLab, identifies the opportunity in front of us:

“If life in the year 2062 turns out to be as different from 2017 as life today is from 1972, the ‘retirement’ that the 20-year-olds will someday face may turn out to bear little resemblance to our current version and may be financed differently as well.”



What do we want that new world to look like? Will we embrace the longevity bonus with policies and programs that promote greater flourishing? How will we redefine a new old age and endow this gift with new forms of societal and individual purpose, connectivity and meaning?

## Let the Conversation Begin...

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Both Marvin and Keren are nationally recognized experts in aging and care systems development for older adults.

### About the Jessie F. Richardson Foundation:

JFRF has tackled issues impacting older adults living in poverty for more than 15 years with a focus on housing, services and sustainability. We succeed in achieving our mission by investing in long-term partnerships to build capacity in local communities. Our goal is to help bridge the gap for older adults, families and communities as we support strategies to address the changing face of aging in Oregon and beyond.

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