

Seniors a growing slice of Alaska

They play a bigger-than-ever role in historically young state

By ERIC SANDBERG

The number of Alaskans 65 or older has skyrocketed over the last decade and a half, continuing to rise even as youth and working-age populations have declined.

Today, seniors play a bigger role in Alaska than they ever have. As Alaska has always been a young state, this shift toward an older population is one of the ways Alaska has begun to look more like the rest of the country.

The boom's history is partly generational, partly pipeline

From village elders to old sourdoughs, Alaska seniors have always had a reputation for toughness and fortitude, holding firm through many winters and outlasting earlier contemporaries. Still, Alaska never had many older people. Historically, the state was populated with children, young families, the military, transient workers, and other young groups such as recent college graduates.

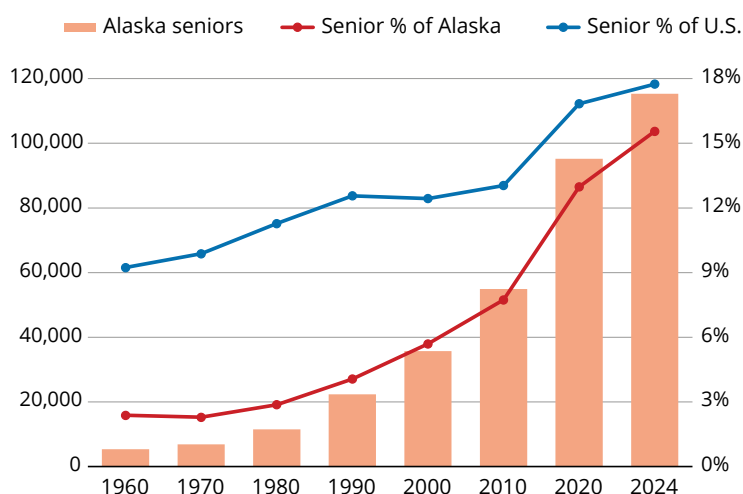
In 1960, just after statehood, only 2 percent of Alaskans were over 65 compared to 9 percent nationally. That year, Alaska's 2 percent represented just 5,400 senior citizens.

Through the early 1970s, Alaska's median age was around 23 — the youngest in the United States.

The seeds of the current senior boom were planted in the 1970s and early '80s. During those decades, people streamed into Alaska to work on the pipeline and in the oil industry. The net migration rate was so high that it routinely hit 5 percent, meaning the population would grow 5 percent in a year through migration alone.

Because those years also corresponded with the large baby boomer generation's entry into the

Seniors as shares of Alaska and the U.S.



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

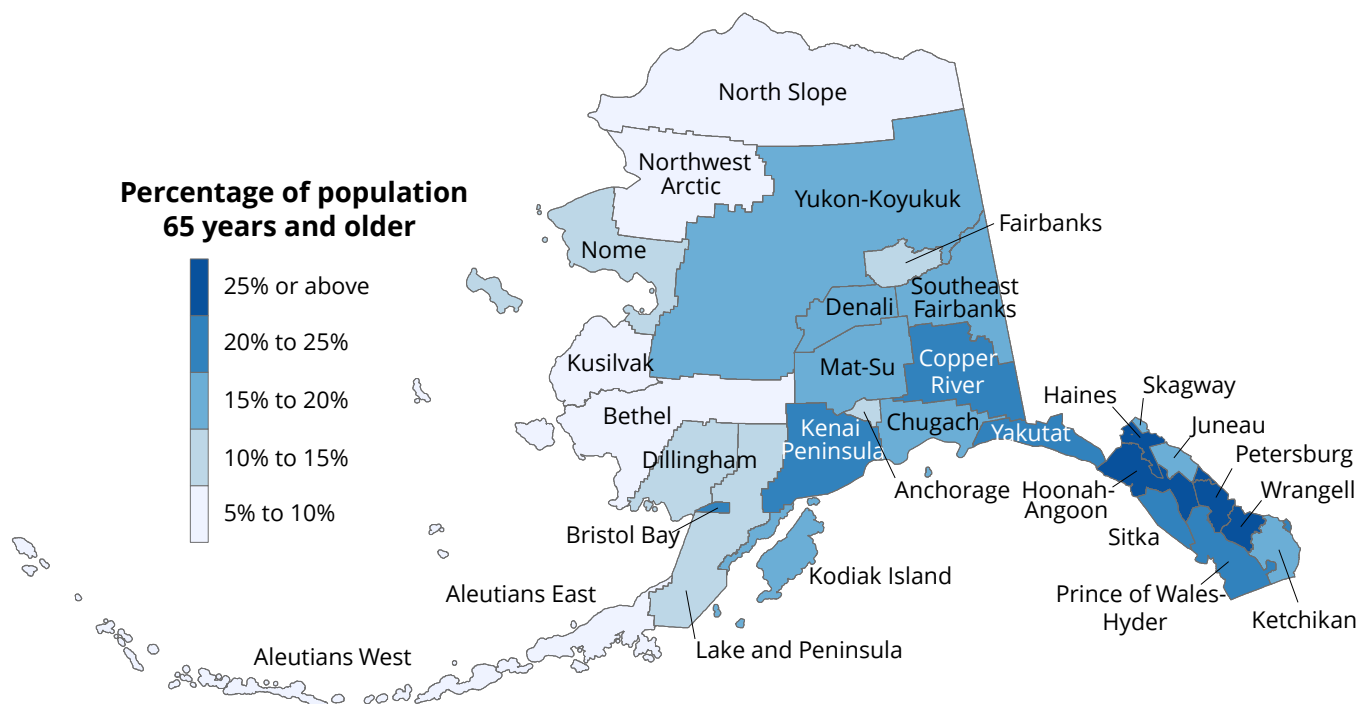
workforce, the inflow supercharged the young adult population. In 1970, Alaska had around 100,000 people between 25 and 49. Twenty years later, that had grown to a quarter million.

The baby boomers were a large generation everywhere, but especially in Alaska due to its small pre-1970 population and because the influx came during the state's boom years.

While boomers were working-age, the small senior population ahead of them was increasing as well. By 1990, it had risen to 22,000 people. Seniors represented only 4 percent of the state's population then, less than a third of the national share and half that of the next-smallest senior state, Utah.

Despite being small, Alaska's senior cohort became one of the fastest-growing by the late 1970s as it rose with the rest of the state's population from a small base. Rapid growth continued through the 1990s and 2000s, ranking Alaska first or second (to Nevada) for its rate of increase. While other states with rapidly rising senior populations were mainly retirement destinations, internal population aging fueled Alaska's senior growth.

Southeast has the most seniors in Alaska proportionally, 2024



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

While the growth rate remained rapid over those decades, by 2010 the state still had the smallest 65-plus population proportionally at 8 percent. But because the national share had held steady at 13 percent, Alaska's gap with the U.S. continued to narrow.

In 2010, just as the oldest baby boomers began to reach 65, Alaska's senior population stood at around 55,000 people. Boomers reaching retirement age started to push that number up considerably. During the 2010s, despite the state falling into consistent net migration losses — more people leaving the state each year than arriving — the senior population grew by 73 percent.

In 2020, Alaska had 95,000 people over 65, reaching 13 percent of the state's population.

By 2024, Alaska's senior count reached 115,000 and 16 percent of the state — close to the national 18 percent — although its growth rate has slowed. Most of Alaska's baby boomers are now over 65, so aging-driven growth has fallen behind some retirement havens in the Lower 48.

After leading the country for the senior increase during the 2000s and 2010s, Alaska's rate fell to fourth

in the early 2020s. In 2023, the most current year for national rankings, Alaska slid to ninth.

More seniors in Southeast, fewest in western Alaska

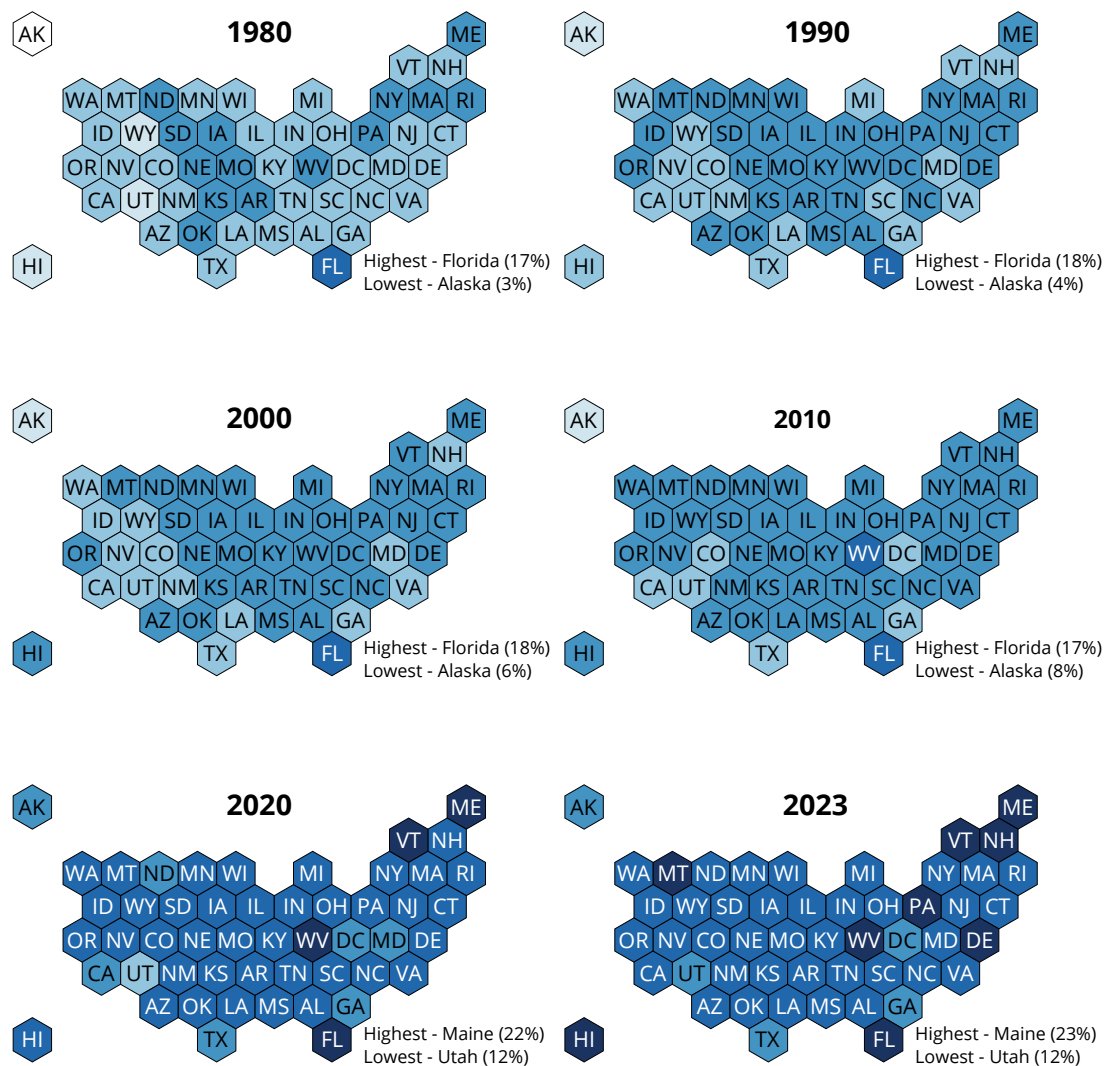
Within boroughs and census areas, the senior percentages vary widely. The highest are in Southeast and the lowest are in western Alaska.

Eleven areas are at least 20 percent seniors, eight of which are in Southeast. Four (Haines, Wrangell, Hoonah-Angoon, and Petersburg) are a quarter or more seniors, with Haines the highest at 29 percent. Every borough and census area in Southeast has a higher-than-average senior percentage.

There's some variation along the rail belt. Fairbanks and Anchorage are lowest outside western Alaska, at 14 and 15 percent, respectively. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is at the statewide average. The Kenai Peninsula Borough, a popular retirement spot, has the highest share among the most populous boroughs at 22 percent.

Eleven boroughs and census areas are at least 20 percent seniors, and eight are in Southeast.

Percentages of people 65 and older by state, 1980-2023



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Western Alaska, with its younger people and remote worksites, has the lowest percentages, especially in worker-heavy areas in the Aleutian Islands and the North Slope Borough, each at just 7 percent.

The gender ratio is unusually close for seniors in Alaska

Alaska has long been known for having more men than women. While it's much less dramatic than in the past, the current ratio of 108 males to 100

females remains the country's highest. Thirteen other states, mostly in the Mountain West or upper Midwest, also have more males across all ages.

Nationally, women outnumber men. The U.S. ratio at birth is 105 boys to 100 girls, which approaches parity around age 40 before tilting toward women the older people get.

No state has more senior men than women. Nationally, the ratio is 82 to 100. Alaska comes closest to equal at 98 per 100, and only four other states have even 90 per 100 (Wyoming, Montana, Idaho,

and South Dakota).

While Alaska's historical male-female skew is a major reason our current senior ratio is so close, the relative youth of the senior population is another. Alaska's median senior age is 72.1, nearly a year younger than Wyoming, the next-youngest state for seniors.

Because the skew trends further toward women at advanced ages, Alaska's ratio may start to resemble the rest of the country as the current senior population gets older.

A different racial makeup than the younger generations

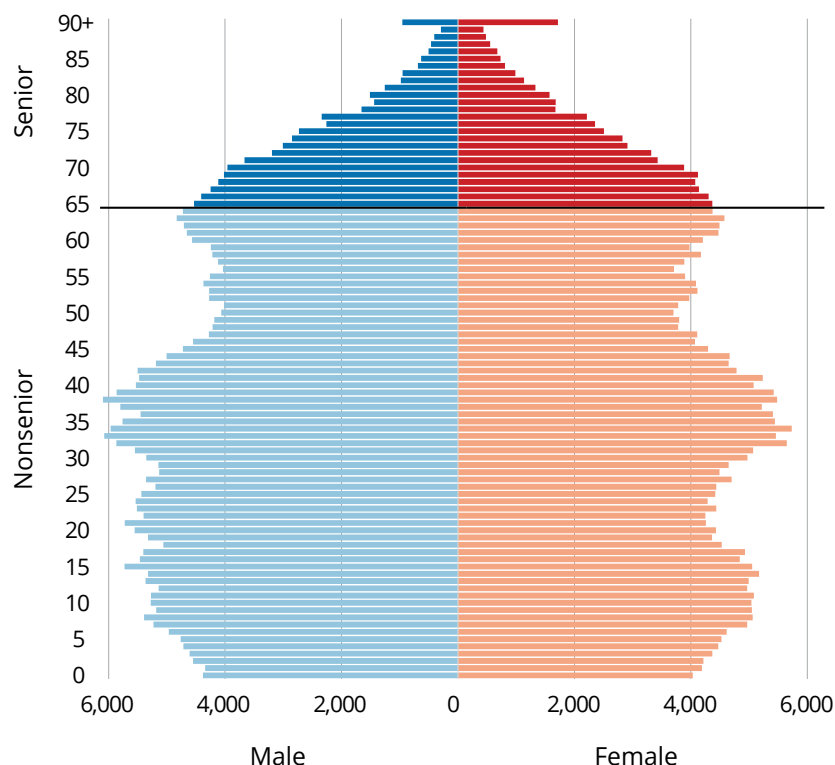
Seniors' racial makeup differs nationwide from younger generations. A larger proportion of the senior population is White, and except for Washington, D.C., every state has a senior population that is more White than its total population. Nationally, 83 percent of seniors are White alone, and for the total population, it's 75 percent.

While Alaska seniors are also mostly White, the share is smaller at 77 percent White alone, and it's only 64 percent among all Alaskans. That 13-point gap is the largest of any state, reflecting the demographic differences between the influx of people in the 1970s and 1980s and Alaska's younger population today.

Every other racial group is smaller among seniors than in the total population. Alaska Natives are the second-largest racial group in the state (nationally, it's Black). Alaska has the highest percentage among states of American Indian or Alaska Native residents for both senior and general populations.

About 11 percent of Alaska seniors identify as Alaska Native alone, down from 16 percent in 2000. This came not from a decline in the Native population but from rapid growth among non-Native seniors.

Breakdown of Alaska by age, gender in 2024



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Every state has a senior population that is more White than its overall population.

The number of Native seniors has more than doubled since 2000, from 5,700 to 12,700.

Adding seniors who identify as part Native increases the numbers to 14 percent of the 65-plus population, a combined 15,100 people.

Small majority live with a spouse

Seniors' living arrangements differ from the rest of the U.S. population. A slim majority live with a spouse in Alaska (53 percent) compared to 49 percent of all adults. Another 3 percent live with an unmarried partner (9 percent for all adults). Around 27 percent of Alaska seniors live alone, matching the U.S. senior average and about twice the general population.

Seniors' marital status reflects the gender differences. Sixty-five percent of the men are married and just 48 percent of the women.

Women over 65 are nearly twice as likely as men to

Living status of those 65-plus

	Alaska		United States	
	Age 65+	Total	Age 65+	Total
Total Population	115,292	741,147	59,248,361	334,914,895
Senior Percentage	16%	-	18%	-
Males Per 100 Females	98.0	107.7	82.5	97.6
Race				
White	77%	64%	83%	75%
Native	11%	16%	1%	1%
Black	2%	4%	10%	14%
Asian	6%	7%	5%	6%
Pacific Islander	1%	2%	0%	0%
Two or More Races	3%	8%	1%	3%
Hispanic (any race)	3%	7%	9%	19%
Living Arrangements				
Alone	27%	14%	27%	14%
With spouse	53%	49%	53%	48%
W/ unmarried partner	3%	9%	2%	7%
With parent (as adult)	0%	11%	0%	12%
With other relatives	14%	11%	14%	13%
W/ other nonrelatives	3%	6%	2%	5%
Marital Status				
Men				
Now Married	65%	49%	68%	50%
Widowed	10%	2%	11%	3%
Divorced	15%	10%	13%	9%
Separated	2%	2%	1%	1%
Never Married	9%	38%	7%	37%
Women				
Now Married	48%	50%	45%	46%
Widowed	24%	6%	30%	8%
Divorced	22%	13%	17%	12%
Separated	1%	2%	1%	2%
Never Married	4%	29%	6%	31%

Note: Alaska population and male-female ratio data are 2024 and the rest of the table is 2023.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

be widowed or divorced, and the reason is twofold. Women generally live longer, and senior men are more likely to be married to nonseniors. Men are also slightly more likely to have never married.

Seniors have become more likely to keep working longer

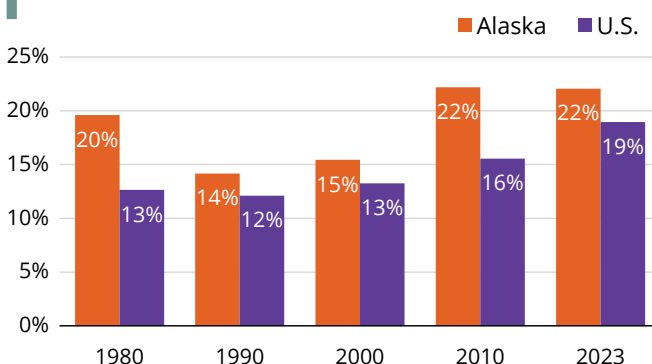
Since it was codified in the 1935 Social Security Act, 65 has been the standard retirement age. Many seniors continue working, however, sometimes because they want to but often because they have to. In addition to financial necessity, it could be a sign of seniors remaining healthier longer than in the past.

The percentage of seniors in the labor force fell through most of the 20th century but then began to climb again. However, Alaska seniors have always been more likely than their U.S. counterparts to work. In 1980, 20 percent were in the state's labor force, above the national 13 percent. At the time, Alaska's rate was the highest among states. It dropped a decade later to 14 percent, just 2 points above the national average.

While both rates started climbing in the current century, Alaska's remains higher at around 22 percent. Although that's above 1980, Alaska's rate now ranks 11th.

Seniors make up about 6 percent of the labor force in Alaska, which is the average. Vermont is highest at 9 percent. Alaska's number is a big jump from previous decades, however. As recently as 2000, only 1 percent of Alaska's labor force were seniors, the lowest in the country at the time.

Seniors in the labor force



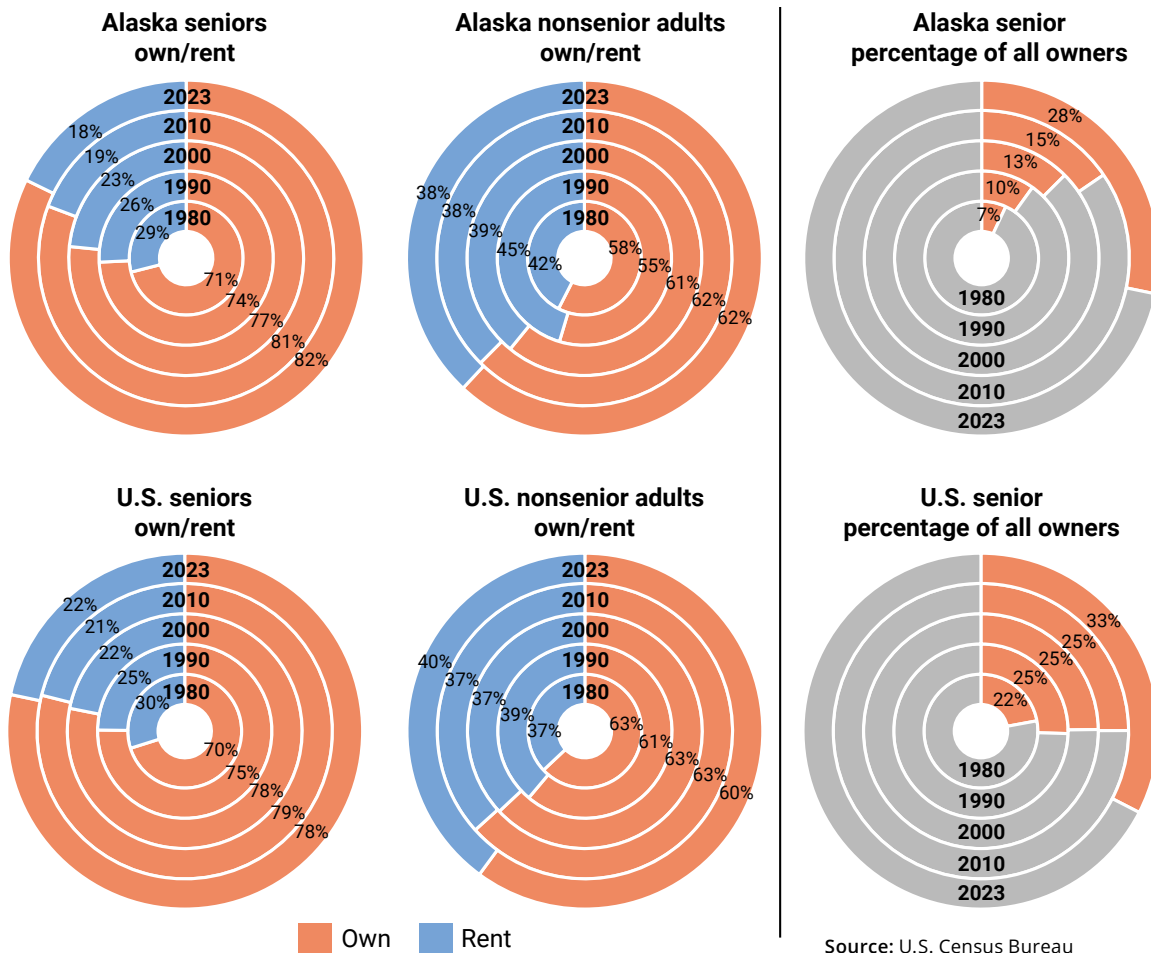
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

How senior household income stacks up here and elsewhere

In 2023, Alaska seniors' median household income was around \$69,000, the sixth highest after the perennial leader Hawaii (\$84,500). Following Hawaii were the heavy federal employment areas of Maryland (\$73,700) and the District of Columbia (\$69,600), then the high-income states California (\$69,400) and New Jersey (\$69,100). Alaska remained well above the national senior median of \$57,100.

Alaska seniors have gained ground for income since 1990, when their median was \$58,500 in 2023 dollars. While second highest after Hawaii at the time,

Seniors more likely to own homes, own a growing share of all homes



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

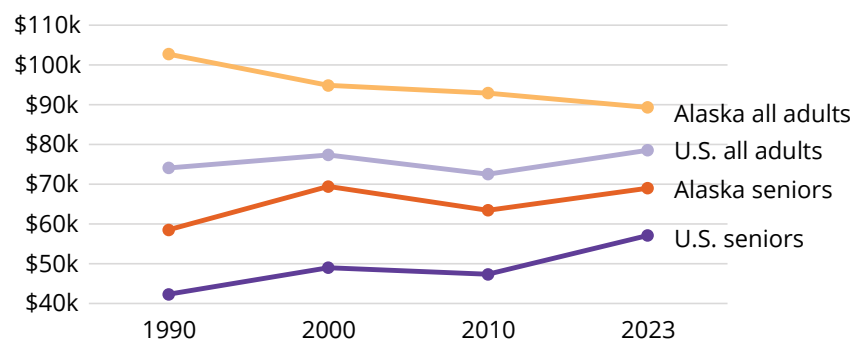
it was still only about 57 percent of Alaska's overall median household income.

Alaska's median income for all ages, adjusted for inflation, shrunk from about \$102,700 in 1990 to \$89,300 in 2023. Senior median household income in Alaska was 77 percent of the total median that year, above the national ratio of 72 percent.

Poverty fell for years but is rising again

Through the last years of the 20th century, senior poverty was declining nationwide. In 1970, a quarter of Alaska seniors lived below the poverty line, less than the national 27 percent.

Inflation-adjusted income for seniors, all adults

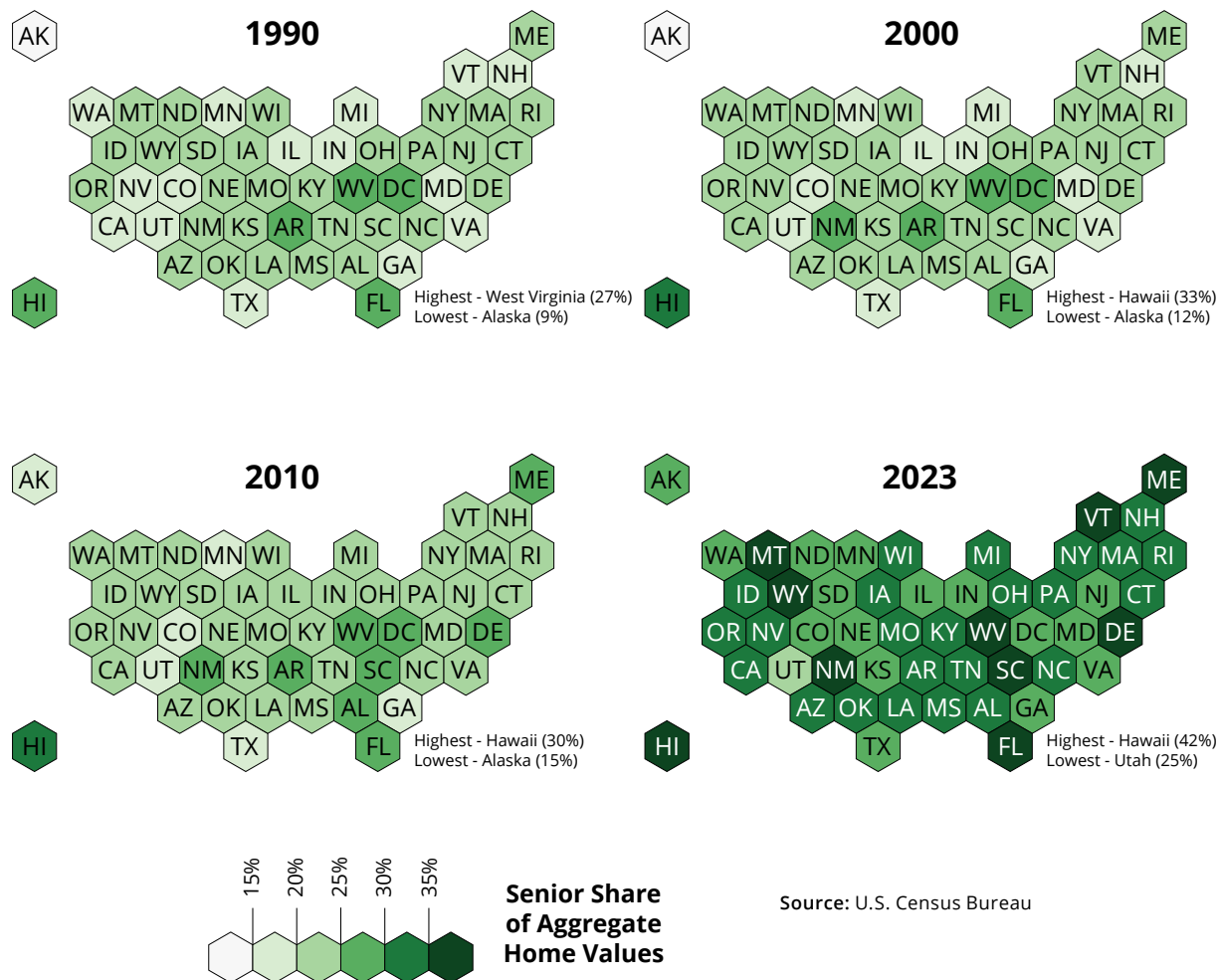


Note: Household income in 2023 dollars
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Over the next two decades, as the oil economy arrived, the next generation of seniors had a poverty rate of 8 percent by 1990, which was even lower than the statewide poverty rate.

The senior poverty rate continued to drop through

Senior-owned shares of U.S. home value have jumped in recent decades



the 1990s and 2000s while the rate for all ages stayed within a tight range. By 2010, Alaska had the lowest senior poverty rate in the country at 5 percent. It has started to inch back up since, though, as the 65-plus population grew and the state's economy hit a series of rough patches.

The most recent numbers from 2023 show Alaska's senior poverty rate back at 8 percent — still one of the lowest. Just four states are below Alaska (Delaware, Utah, New Hampshire, and Wyoming). The rise, however, moved the rate closer to Alaska's overall and national senior poverty rates of 10 percent.

Seniors have increased as a share of homeowners in recent decades

Seniors have always been more likely to own homes

than the rest of the population, as they have had longer to buy. Over the last few decades, their share of the homeownership total increased in Alaska and the U.S. As ownership rates for younger adults stalled, the gap between the percentages of 65-plus and under-65 who own homes slowly expanded.

About two-thirds of U.S. householders own, a rate that has held steady since 1980. Among seniors nationally, the rate rose from 70 percent in 1980 to 78 percent in 2000, where it has hovered since.

In Alaska, the general population went from having one of the lowest homeownership rates in 1980 (58 percent) to roughly equal the national average in 2023 at 66 percent. Alaska seniors who own increased even more, from 71 percent in 1980 to 82 percent in 2023.

As seniors own homes at a higher rate and their population has grown, so has the proportion of

Alaska homeowners who are over 65. In 1980, it was around 7 percent, which doubled to 15 percent by 2010 — still the lowest in the country. The second-lowest was Colorado at 20 percent.

Since 2010, seniors have doubled again to 28 percent of Alaska homeowners. That was the largest increase of any state, leaving Alaska five percentage points below the national average and no longer the lowest (Utah).

... and own a growing share of home value

As a result, seniors own a larger share of Alaska's home property value. The aggregative total housing value is the total estimated market value of all housing units.

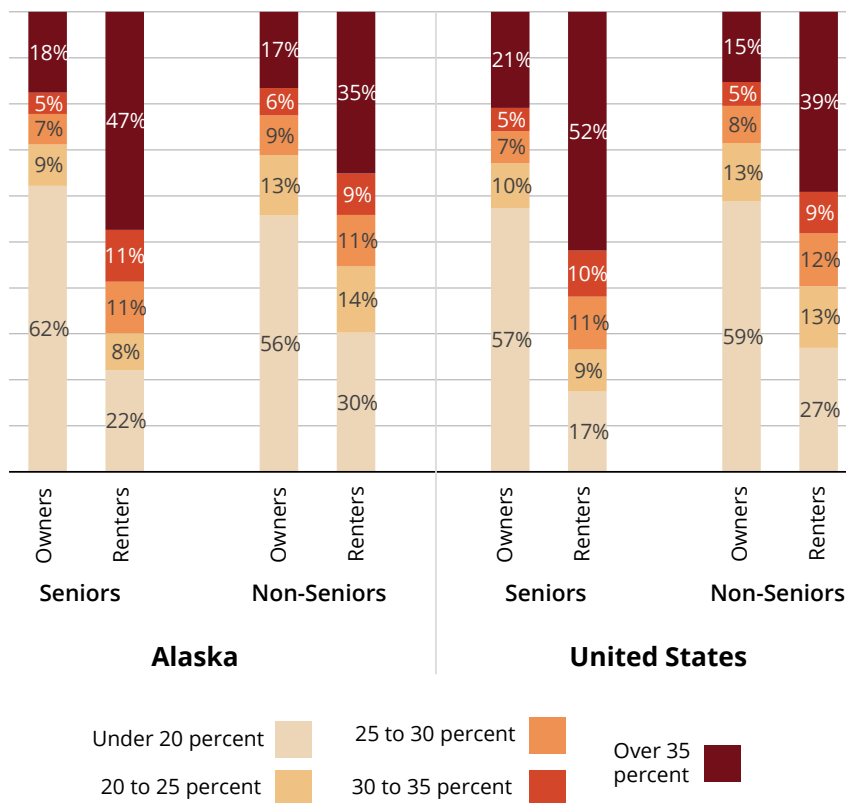
In 1990, seniors owned about 9 percent of Alaska's home value, the least in the country and less than half the national average. (Colorado was second-lowest at 16 percent.)

Through the 1990s and 2000s, seniors' share of the Alaska housing market grew and the gap with the rest of the country narrowed, but Alaska remained the lowest-share state. In 2000, seniors owned 12 percent of the state's housing value and 15 percent by 2010.

After the large baby boomer generation began to reach 65, the senior share rose quickly. By 2023, seniors in Alaska owned 28 percent of housing value, just four percentage points under the national average. Alaska now ranks 46th for the senior percentage, passing Utah, Texas, Georgia, Minnesota, and North Dakota. Hawaii is highest at 42 percent.

Data by area don't cover everywhere in the state because of insufficient sampling, but available local numbers show wide variation. In Anchorage and Fairbanks, seniors hold 26 and 27 percent of local housing value, about the same as the statewide portion. In Mat-Su, which has most of the state's newer housing, it's 23 percent.

Renting seniors spend big slice on housing, 2023



Percentage of gross household income spent on housing

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The Kenai Peninsula, with its large retiree population, is well above the statewide average at 38 percent. Seniors also own a high percentage of the home value in Southeast; it's 32 percent in Juneau and climbs above 40 percent in smaller boroughs such as Sitka and Petersburg.

Mortgages and how much income senior citizens spend on housing

About two-thirds of senior owners no longer have a mortgage to pay, while 40 percent of all owners' homes are paid off. Seniors have typically lived in their homes longer, with over half having moved in before 2000 and more than 30 percent before 1990. Only 26 percent of all homeowners moved in before 2000.

For the 18 percent of seniors who rent, it's a different story. Although senior renters have also lived in their homes longer, the majority moved in after 2018, and over 73 percent after 2010.

There's also a massive gulf between owners and renters in how much income they spend on housing. Thirty percent of gross household income spent on housing each month has long been the upper threshold for what's affordable, but 59 percent of renting seniors in Alaska spend more than that. That's slightly less than the 62 percent of U.S. senior renters but more than all Alaska renters.

Far fewer owners spend above that threshold. Homeowner costs include mortgages or loans, taxes, insurance, fees, and utilities. Just 22 percent of Alaska senior homeowners spend above the 30 percent income threshold, roughly the same as nonsenior owners but less than 26 percent for U.S. seniors.

At the other end of housing affordability are those who spend less than 20 percent of their income on housing costs or rent. For Alaska senior homeowners, with longer tenure and fewer still paying mortgages, 62 percent spend less than a fifth of their monthly income. However, it's just 22 percent of the senior renters.

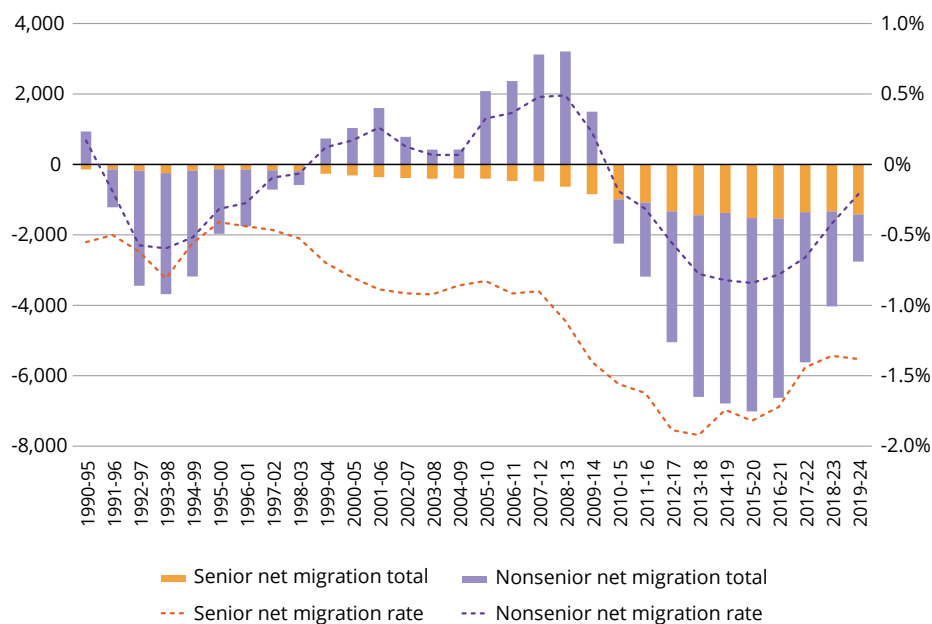
Do older people really flee Alaska?

It's a common perception that Alaska retirees move south for warmer weather or the services they can't get in Alaska. The massive growth in the 65-plus population puts to rest the idea that they *all* flee after retirement — but given Alaska's 12-year streak of negative net migration, that raises the question: How much has the larger elder population contributed to the overall outflow?

People relocate less as they get older. In the last five years, seniors were only 9 percent of the total migrants into and out of Alaska, up from 2 percent in the 1990s. Still, while seniors have always been a low percentage of movers, they have increasingly influenced net migration numbers in recent years.

The exhibit above shows, in rolling five-year averages, the annual totals and rates for the senior and

Share of seniors leaving state increased over time



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

nonsenior populations. Even when total net migration has been positive, the net flow of seniors has invariably been outward. As their numbers grew, the net outflow increased concurrently.

In the early 1990s, annual senior net migration was around 140 more leaving each year than arriving. By the late 2000s, it was between 400 and 500, which tripled to 1,500 a decade later.

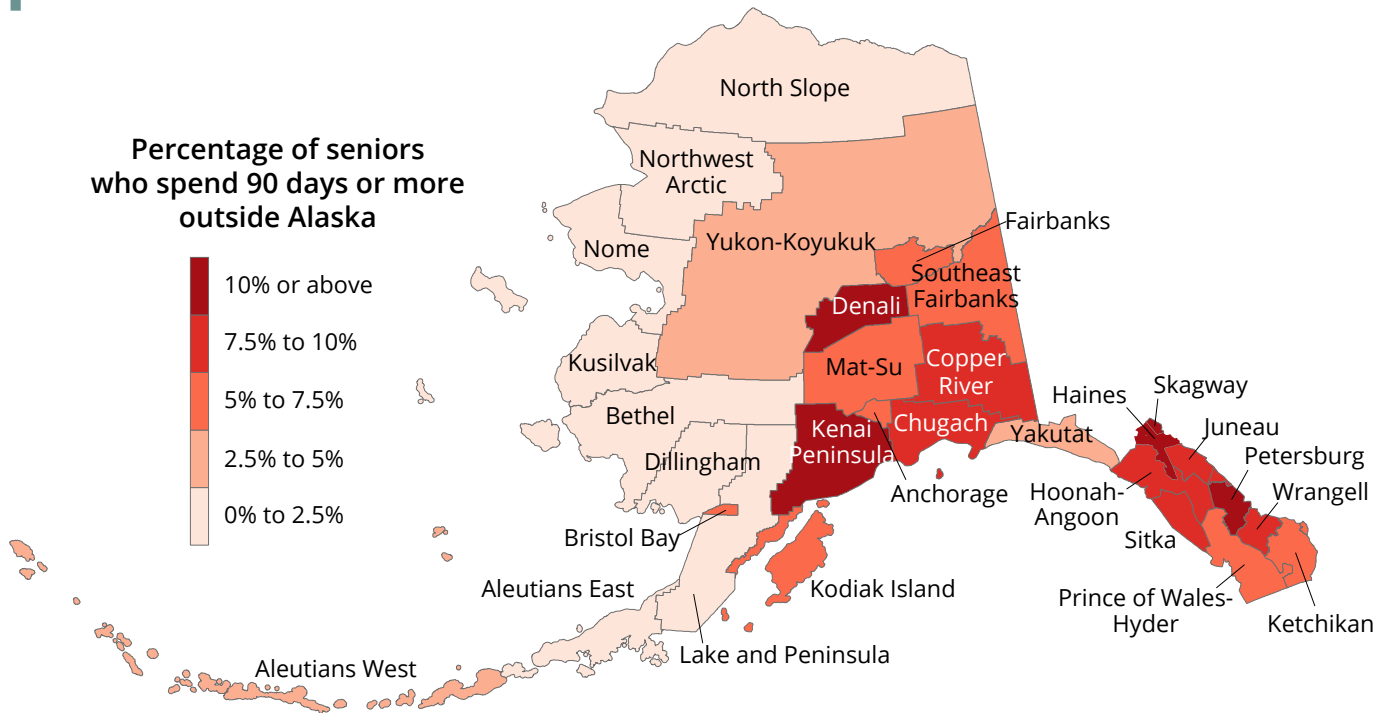
Although the outflow has increased, it hasn't stopped the age group from growing in Alaska, nor is it the primary reason for the state's net loss streak, which is the net outflow of working-age adults and children. However, the bigger and consistent senior outflow has created an undertow to the state's migration numbers that didn't exist before, which has baked in a steady net loss.

In the most recent five-year period, as the total net outflow slowed somewhat from the late-2010s nadir, senior net migration losses did not ease alongside the younger ages; in fact, senior losses overtook nonseniors.

Given that increase, are seniors more likely to leave than in the past? The short answer is yes.

Net migration *rates* divide the net migration totals by the underlying population, and this is useful in determining whether the growing outflow of seniors is proportionally larger or is growing in tandem with the size of their population.

Popularity of 'snowbirding' by those 65+ varies by Alaska area, 2024



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Like the totals, the senior net migration rate has fallen more negative over time.

In the late 1990s, senior net migration losses represented about 0.5 percent of the senior population each year. That increased to a -1 percent loss per year by around 2010. After Alaska's net loss streak began, senior migration numbers also became more negative, bottoming out in the mid-to-late 2010s at -1.9 percent before rebounding slightly in the current decade to about -1.4 percent.

Senior net migration rates have been at least twice as negative as nonseniors for most of the current streak.

A look at those who snowbird

A related migration question is how many Alaska seniors fly south for the winter.

Living outside the state for the part of the year is known as "snowbirding." Snowbirds fall into an intermediate category between those who live here year-round and those who leave permanently.

As such, snowbirds are hard to measure because they either remain residents and therefore aren't counted as out-migrants, or, conversely, they spend a significant amount of the year in Alaska but are nonresidents, so

they don't show up in the population data.

The best answer comes from absences on Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend applications. Alaskans who apply for the PFD cannot be gone for more than 180 days without an approved reason (college, military, hospitalization, etc.), and those gone more than 90 days must note it.

The PFD data show how many people were out of Alaska for more than three months but less than six months, still qualifying as residents for the dividend. The nonresidents who don't spend enough of the year here to qualify remain out of scope.

PFD data show the number and percentage of seniors who spend at least 90 days out of Alaska each year has increased over the last few decades. In the early 1990s, 3 percent — about 800 seniors — snowbirded annually, about the same share as the total population. Since then, the overall population's snowbird percentage has stayed between 3 and 4 percent while senior absences began to climb in the late 1990s, doubling to 6 percent by the mid-2000s.

By 2012, as baby boomers began to turn 65, the senior absence rate plateaued around 8 percent. However, the *number* kept growing with the senior population, from about 4,500 snowbirds in 2012 to 6,800 in 2019.

Rates and types of disabilities among senior citizens, 2023

	Alaska			United States		
	All seniors	65-74	75+	All seniors	65-74	75+
Total with Disability	35%	28%	50%	33%	24%	47%
Men with Disability	38%	32%	52%	33%	25%	46%
Women with Disability	33%	25%	49%	33%	23%	47%
Total with Hearing Difficulty	18%	14%	27%	13%	8%	21%
Men with Hearing Difficulty	24%	20%	34%	17%	12%	26%
Women with Hearing Difficulty	12%	8%	21%	11%	6%	18%
Total with Vision Difficulty	7%	5%	11%	6%	4%	9%
Men with Vision Difficulty	8%	6%	12%	6%	4%	8%
Women with Vision Difficulty	7%	4%	11%	6%	4%	9%
Total with Cognitive Difficulty	8%	5%	14%	8%	5%	12%
Men with Cognitive Difficulty	7%	4%	13%	7%	5%	11%
Women with Cognitive Difficulty	10%	6%	15%	8%	5%	13%
Total with Ambulatory Difficulty	20%	15%	30%	21%	15%	30%
Men with Ambulatory Difficulty	18%	14%	29%	18%	13%	26%
Women with Ambulatory Difficulty	21%	16%	32%	23%	16%	33%
Total with Self-Care Difficulty	7%	4%	13%	7%	4%	12%
Men with Self-Care Difficulty	6%	3%	11%	6%	4%	10%
Women with Self-Care Difficulty	8%	5%	14%	8%	4%	13%
Total with Independent Living Difficulty	12%	8%	20%	13%	7%	22%
Men with Independent Living Difficulty	9%	6%	16%	11%	6%	17%
Women with Independent Living Difficulty	14%	10%	23%	16%	8%	26%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Snowbirding plunged during the pandemic to 5 percent, a level not seen in two decades. It has since rebounded to 7 percent, and the number has continued to rise with senior growth, topping 7,000 in 2024.

The snowbirding rate varies widely by area. (See the map on the previous page.) Haines leads the state with over 13 percent of seniors absent at least 90 days a year, followed closely by Petersburg with just under 13 percent.

Three other boroughs have rates over 10 percent, including the Kenai Peninsula Borough and the seasonal tourism-heavy Skagway and Denali boroughs. Juneau's snowbirding rate is just under 10 percent. Fairbanks and Mat-Su are close to the state average of 7 percent, and Anchorage is at 6. In rural western Alaska, few seniors leave the state for long stretches.

Rates of disability and the most common types differ by gender

Life expectancy for Alaska seniors has increased over time. In the early 1990s, an Alaskan turning 65 had a life expectancy of 15.6 more years. That rose to 17.4 years by the mid-2010s. By the outset of the pandemic, it had topped 21 years, which dipped

during COVID-19 to 19.8. The most recent figure from 2023 is an additional 20.4 years — back on the upward track.

Living longer means more disabilities. The U.S. Census Bureau surveys six self-reported disability types: difficulty with hearing, vision, cognitive ability, walking (ambulatory), self-care, and independent living.

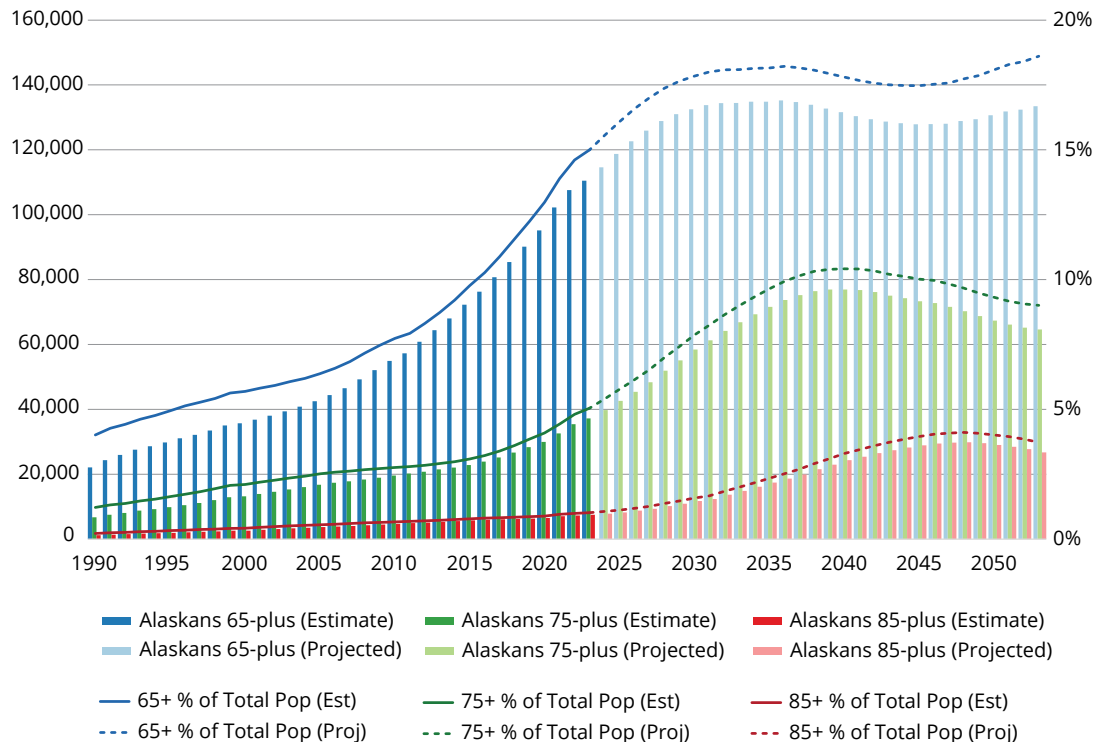
In 2023, Alaska seniors reported a slightly higher incidence of disability than nationally, with both increasing after age 75.

Around 32 percent of Alaska men aged 65 to 74 had a disability compared to 25 percent nationally. For Alaska men 75 years and over, it was 52 percent (46 percent nationwide).

Women's rate was slightly lower for Alaska but still above the national average. From ages 65 to 74, 25 percent of Alaska women reported a disability compared to 23 percent for the U.S. For those over 75, it was 49 and 47 percent, respectively.

Men and women also differ in disability types. Women are much less likely to have hearing problems, and their most common difficulty is walking. While men have slightly lower rates of difficulty with walking

Alaska's older population by age group, 1990 through 2053 projected



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

and independent living, that's partly because more women live into the oldest age groups.

What 30-year projections show for the senior population

The future size of Alaska's senior population is uncertain, but projections provide likely scenarios. We released new 30-year population projections last year.

Projections age Alaska's population forward, taking age-specific death and net migration rates into account each future year. The exhibit on this page shows the size (bars) and percentage of Alaska's total population (lines) for the 65-plus population in blue, the 75-plus population in green, and the 85-plus population in red.

Population estimates since 1990 are in darker shades and projections to 2053 are lighter shades.

Alaska's 65-plus population will continue to grow for the next decade, though the rate will slow. The current 115,000 will increase to around 135,000 by the middle of the 2030s.

As a percentage of the state's population, seniors will rise from the current 16 percent to 18 percent. After that, the total will decline somewhat with

an increased death rate plus a smaller generation entering their senior years, bottoming out in the mid-2040s at around 128,000. By the end of that decade, however, the large millennial generation will start hitting 65 and Alaska's senior population will increase again.

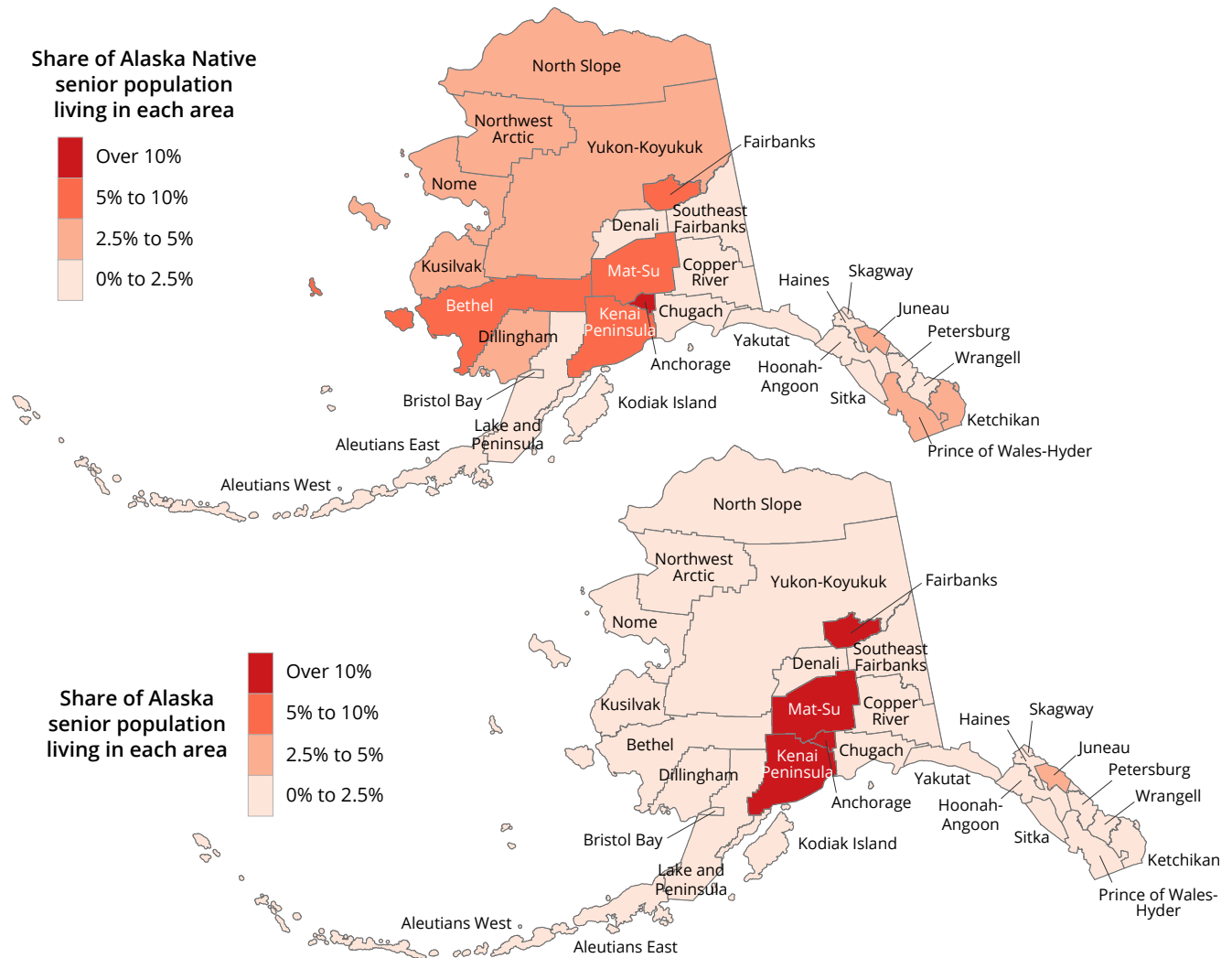
For the older senior age groups, the peak years will come later. The leading end of the baby boomer generation is now crossing age 75, so this age group will increase considerably over the next 15 years. From its current size of around 40,000, the 75-plus count will nearly double to 77,000 in 2040. It will also double as a percentage of the state's population, from 5 to 10 percent. After 2040, the number will decline.

For the 85-and-older group, the peak will come in the late 2040s. Only 1 percent of Alaskans, or around 7,500, are currently at least 85 years old. We expect that number will cross 20,000 by the late 2030s and peak in the late 2040s at 30,000.

Native seniors' long-term growth pattern will differ

As mentioned earlier, Alaska Native seniors number around 15,100 when including those who are part Native, and they represent 14 percent of Alaska's senior population.

Where Alaska Native seniors live, compared with all Alaska seniors, 2023



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

We project the Alaska Native senior population will grow faster than other seniors over the next 30 years. That could make health care access a more pressing issue, as Native seniors are more likely to live in rural areas. (See the map above.)

In 2023, about 50 percent lived outside of the five most populous boroughs, which is a larger percentage than Alaska Natives overall (46 percent) and far more than Alaskans in general (20 percent) and all seniors (18 percent).

By 2030, the Alaska Native senior population will have risen to 23,200, or 17 percent of seniors. While the total 65-plus population will decline somewhat in the mid-2030s before ticking up again, the number of Native seniors will continue to grow,

although slowly. The number will reach 28,000 in 2040, representing 21 percent of all seniors. By 2050 it will be a quarter, at more than 32,000.

Alaska Natives in the upper age brackets will also increase considerably in the next 30 years. Alaska currently has about 4,800 Natives who are 75-plus and 900 who are at least 85. Both will nearly double by 2030, to 8,900 and 1,600.

By 2040, more than 14,300 Alaska Natives will be at least 75, rising to 15,900 by 2050. For those 85-plus, the total will double in the 2030s to 3,400 by 2040 and then 5,200 in 2050.

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