

Growing role of workers over 65

Numbers, share of workforce on a 20-year upward trend

By KARINNE WIEBOLD

Although Alaska residents who are 65 or older and still working make up a small percentage of the state's resident workforce, the percentage has more than tripled in the last 20 years.

Two separate trends are contributing to the increase. First, much of the unusually large baby boomer cohort — people born between 1946 and 1964 — has moved into the 65-plus age group. So one reason the percentage of 65-plus workers has increased is simply that the share of the total population that is over 65 has increased.

Second, migration-related losses and lower birth rates have reduced the working-age population, ages 18 to 64, over the last decade. In 2013, Alaska had 32,500 more working-age people than it had in 2023.

Pandemic years saw different patterns for U.S., Alaska seniors

Although seniors make up a larger share of the workforce, that doesn't mean a higher percentage

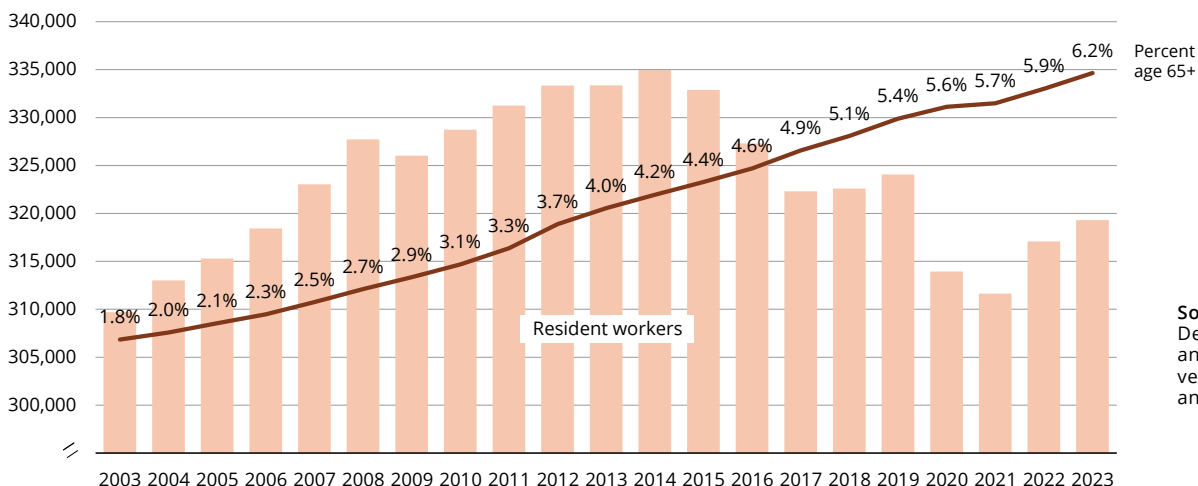
are working. Labor force participation across the board fell nationally at the beginning of the pandemic, but unlike other age groups, U.S. seniors haven't fully returned. Retirement is "sticky," meaning that once people retire, they usually don't reenter the labor force. Health and safety may have been a primary concern for older workers early on in the pandemic, but that had largely subsided by 2023.

Some seniors don't have a financial need to return. The baby boomer generation that's straddling the work/retirement fence has more financial assets than other age groups, and in the last several years, their home prices, stock portfolios, and retirement accounts have fared unusually well despite the pandemic disruptions. They are also more likely than younger generations to have a pension, another source of stable income.

From 2019 to 2021, the number of workers over 65 held steady as Alaska's total resident worker count fell by 12,400. As a result, seniors became a larger share of the state's workforce.

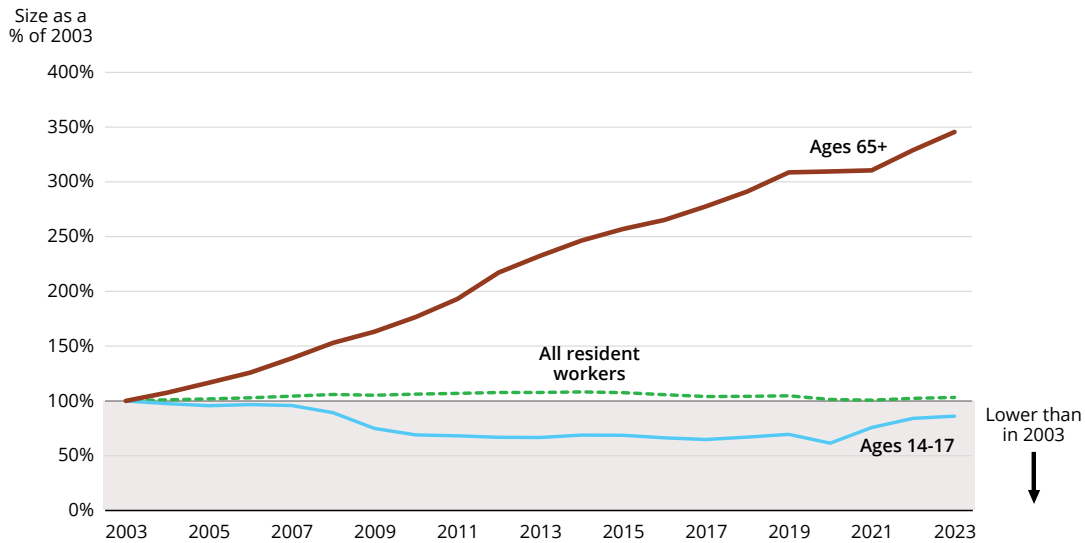
However, because the total *population* over 65 increased while the number of seniors working stayed the same, the percentage of people over 65 who were working actually declined.

65-and-older share of resident workforce is on a long-term rise



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

Resident worker group sizes as a percentage of their 2003 counts



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

Most working seniors are younger, concentrated in certain industries

The median age of Alaska's working seniors is 68. Wages and the number of workers generally decline after 65.

Mirroring Alaska's overall workforce, most seniors are in the private sector. Private-sector industries with the highest senior percentages are private education, manufacturing, and arts, entertainment, and recreation.

Seafood processing drives the high number of seniors in manufacturing, especially in Kodiak, where 20 percent of processing workers are 65 or older. Ten other small communities' resident seafood processing workforces are over 10 percent seniors, although seafood processing relies mainly on out-of-state workers.

By sector, local governments employ the most seniors overall. They also have one of the highest senior percentages, mainly in public schools. If we exclude school districts, local government is just over the statewide average of 6.2 percent for its senior share. Schools are much higher (9 percent).

A noteworthy industry for its *number* of seniors is health care and private social assistance (more than 3,300). Health care employment has risen steadily for decades and shows no signs of slowing. The industry

Workers age 65+ by industry, 2023

	Percent seniors	Number of seniors
Total	6%	19,697
Local Government (incl Public Schools)	8%	3,414
Health Care and Social Assistance	7%	3,323
Retail Trade	6%	2,249
Transportation and Warehousing	7%	1,466
State Government	6%	1,351
Accommodation and Food Services	4%	1,034
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Svcs	7%	940
Admin, Support, Waste Mgmt/Remediation	7%	897
Construction	4%	892
Other Services (except Public Administration)	6%	720
Manufacturing	8%	684
Mining, Quarrying, Oil and Gas Extraction	4%	404
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	8%	392
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	7%	381
Wholesale Trade	6%	363
Information	6%	284
Finance and Insurance	4%	276
Educational Services	9%	234
Utilities	5%	136
Management of Companies and Enterprises	7%	133
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	5%	92
Unknown/Unavailable/Other	5%	32

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

has also struggled to hire, especially since the pandemic.

The State of Alaska, which has also grappled with staffing issues in recent years, employed more than 1,300 older workers in 2023: 800 in general government and 500-plus at the University of Alaska.

Similar to local government, general state government is on par with the Alaska average while schools are higher. Ten percent of the University of Alaska's workforce is over 65.

Older workers span many occupations

Unlike young workers, who are concentrated in just a few types of work, workers over 65 show up in hundreds of occupations.

Retail sales worker is the top occupational category for seniors, followed by health practitioners, office/administrative support, and teachers. When grouped, health care and teaching stand out, as do office and transportation work.

Seniors make up just 4 percent of construction and extraction workers, but there are still hundreds in these and other physically demanding jobs.

Top 25 occupations for older workers, 2023

	Workers 65+	Avg wage
Retail Sales Workers	1,378	\$24,598
Health Care Diagnosing or Treating Practitioners	811	\$95,952
Other Office and Administrative Support Workers	809	\$35,893
Other Teachers and Instructors	774	\$22,140
Motor Vehicle Operators	746	\$39,289
Building Cleaning and Pest Control Workers	731	\$29,136
Top Executives	720	\$103,668
Home/Personal Care Aides; Nursing Assts, Orderlies	692	\$27,510
Information and Record Clerks	691	\$26,812
Construction Trades Workers	664	\$47,383
Other Management Occupations	607	\$78,591
Material Moving Workers	525	\$42,166
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	485	\$38,001
Counselors and Social Workers	484	\$49,102
Other Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	466	\$50,838
Financial Clerks	444	\$42,350
Other Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	422	\$23,879
Cooks and Food Preparation Workers	407	\$26,794
Food Processing Workers	363	\$34,554
Postsecondary Teachers	357	\$43,308
Business Operations Specialists	329	\$66,933
Food and Beverage Serving Workers	318	\$23,265
Other Personal Care and Service Workers	298	\$17,711
Preschool, Elem, Middle, Secondary, Spec Ed Teachers	297	\$55,743
Operations Specialties Managers	291	\$85,818
Other Protective Service Workers	267	\$32,417

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

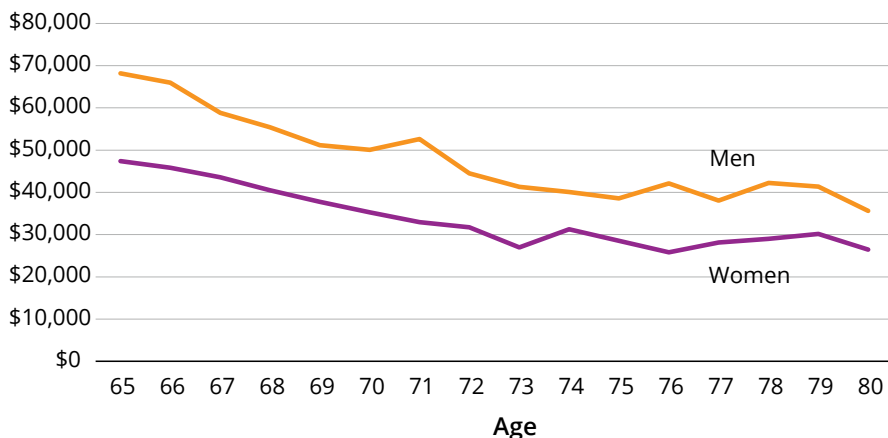
Men earn more, and the gap is wider among seniors

Women represent just over half of working seniors, but men earn more, averaging \$54,835 a year compared to \$38,797.

The gender wage gap is more pronounced among people over 65 than younger groups, with women earning 71 cents for every dollar men earn. It's 73 cents for all ages combined and nearly equal for ages 14-17.

The gap widens with age as multiple variables drive men's and women's wages apart. Examples include the choice of industry and job, education and training, and time spent out of the workforce, such as caring for children.

Senior men earn more than women at every age, 2023



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

Top jobs for older men include motor vehicle operators, construction trades workers, and retail salespeople.

When all types of teachers are combined, they become the largest occupation for older women. Others include retail sales workers, office and administrative support, doctors, information and record clerks, and home health and personal care aides.

Although older women also hold high-paying jobs as doctors, executives, and lawyers, there are fewer women in these positions, and they earn less than men in the same occupations.

Workers 65 and older by area

The oldest areas tend to have the highest shares of older workers, led by Hoonah-Angoon and Haines.

(See the maps on the next page.) Conversely, younger areas such as Kuslivak, Bethel, and the Northwest Arctic Borough were low for senior workers.

In two areas, commuting plays a role in their lower shares of working seniors.

The North Slope Borough's oil and gas industry attracts large numbers of workers from elsewhere, and few are over 65.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is middle-of-the-pack for its senior population but has one of the lowest rates of working seniors. Nearly 700 Mat-Su seniors commute to Anchorage, categorizing them as Anchorage workers. Only 100 Anchorage seniors commute to Mat-Su.

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Top 25 occupations for men, women 65 and older in Alaska, 2023

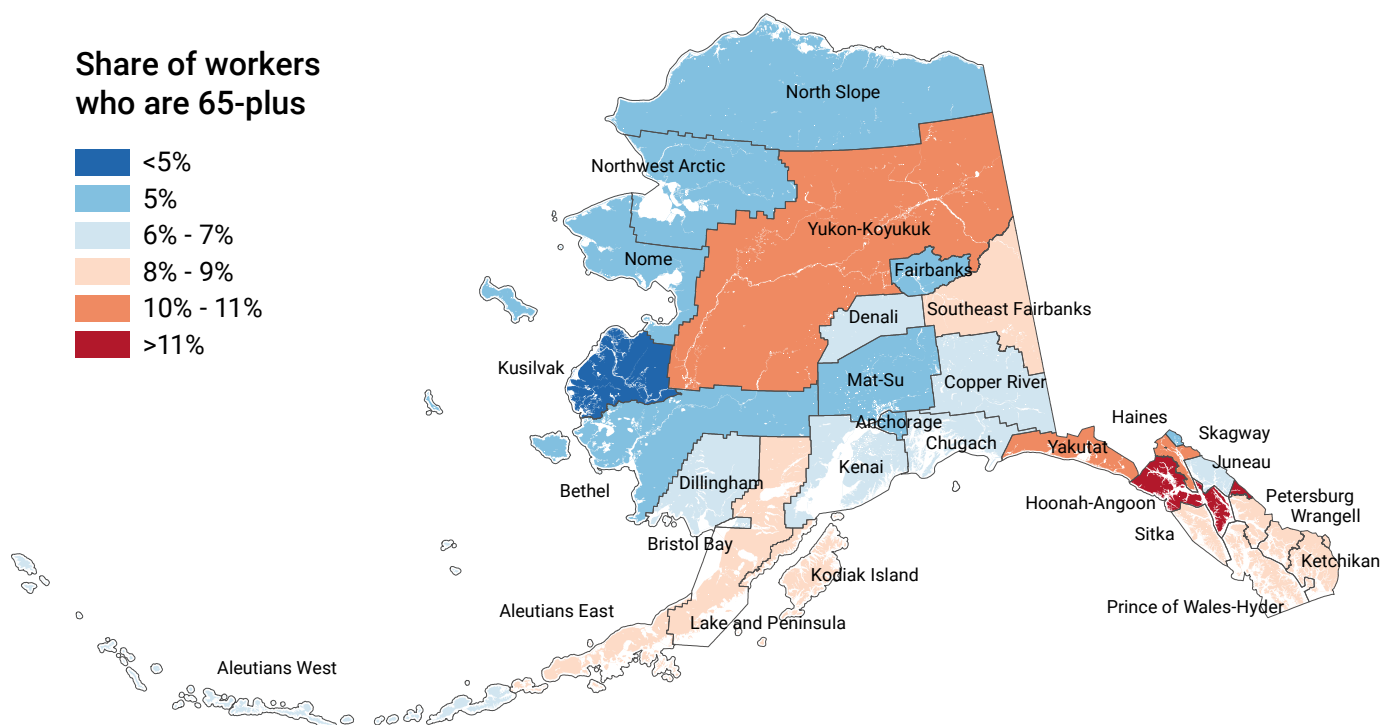
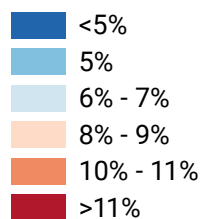
For men	Men 65+	Avg wage
Motor Vehicle Operators	654	\$40,350
Construction Trades Workers	627	\$48,738
Retail Sales Workers	571	\$28,970
Top Executives	460	\$112,799
Installation, Maint, and Repair Occupations	431	\$52,066
Material Moving Workers	417	\$46,829
Building Cleaning and Pest Control Workers	401	\$30,145
Other Management Occupations	331	\$85,680
Vehicle/Mobile Equipment Mechanics	248	\$62,501
Other Teachers and Instructors	226	\$24,311
Health Care Diagnosing or Treating Practitioners	226	\$141,718
Food Processing Workers	220	\$34,625
Postsecondary Teachers	201	\$48,717
Engineers	199	\$103,103
Office and Administrative Support Workers	188	\$41,854
Other Protective Service Workers	177	\$36,949
Business Operations Specialists	175	\$72,684
Cooks and Food Preparation Workers	171	\$30,359
Computer Occupations	152	\$84,633
Other Construction and Related Workers	146	\$48,040
Operations Specialties Managers	141	\$94,700
Counselors, Social Workers, Similar Specialists	140	\$50,607
Other Transportation Workers	138	\$52,807
Home Health/Personal Care Aides, Similar Assts	135	\$27,932
Information and Record Clerks	132	\$29,476

For women	Women 65+	Avg wage
Retail Sales Workers	807	\$21,504
Office and Administrative Support Workers	621	\$34,088
Health Care Diagnosing or Treating Practitioners	585	\$78,271
Information and Record Clerks	559	\$26,183
Home Health/Personal Care Aides, Similar Assts	557	\$27,407
Other Teachers and Instructors	548	\$21,245
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	428	\$38,505
Financial Clerks	380	\$39,565
Counselors, Social Workers, Similar Specialists	344	\$48,490
Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	337	\$23,907
Building Cleaning and Pest Control Workers	330	\$27,910
Other Management Occupations	276	\$70,090
Top Executives	260	\$87,514
Preschool, Elem, Middle, HS, Spec Ed Teachers	237	\$56,219
Cooks and Food Preparation Workers	236	\$24,210
Food and Beverage Serving Workers	219	\$23,592
Other Personal Care and Service Workers	216	\$17,791
Other Health Care Support Occupations	164	\$36,887
Postsecondary Teachers	156	\$36,339
Business Operations Specialists	154	\$60,398
Operations Specialties Managers	150	\$77,470
Financial Specialists	149	\$62,434
Food Processing Workers	143	\$34,446
Health Technologists and Technicians	136	\$57,362
Supervisors of Sales Workers	111	\$31,245

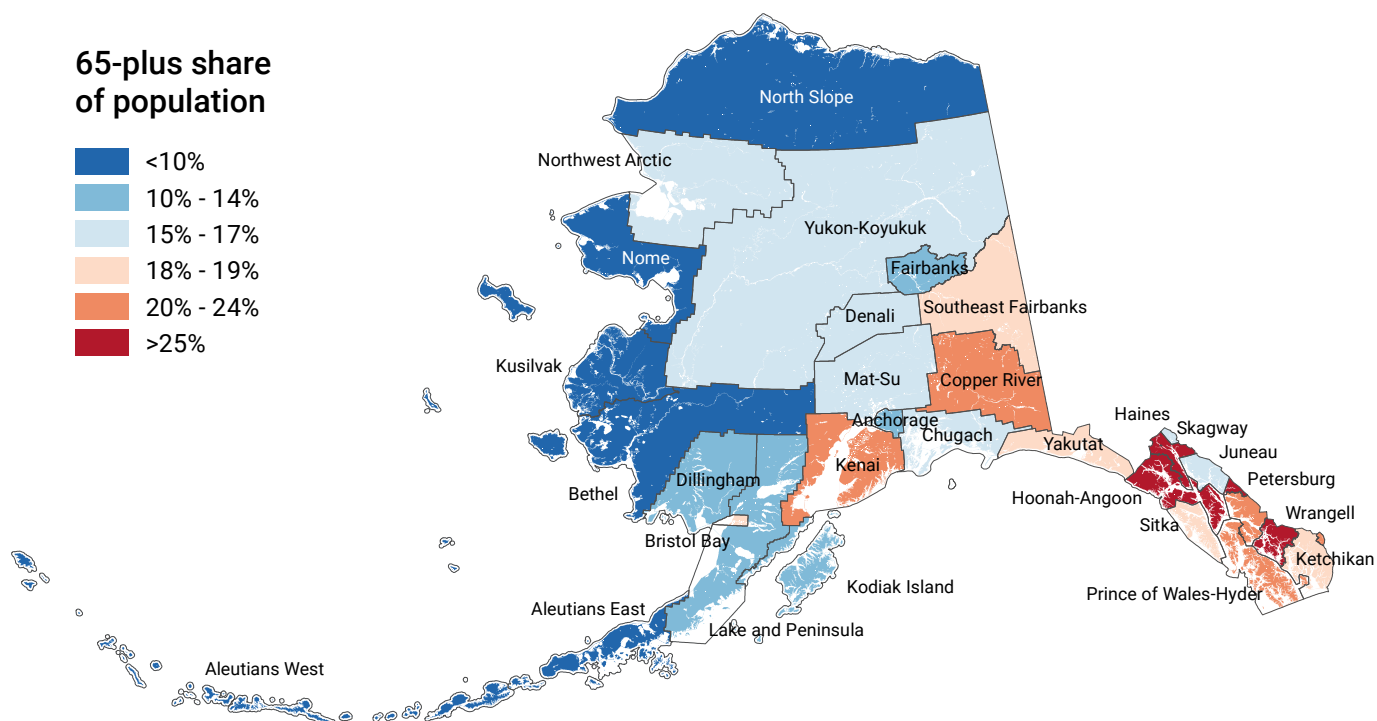
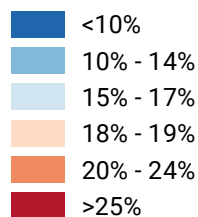
Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

People over age 65 as a percentage of area workforces and populations, 2023

Share of workers who are 65-plus



65-plus share of population



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