



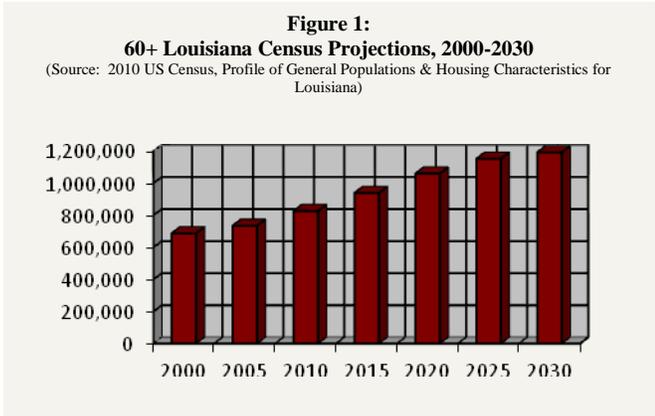
# Meeting the Housing Needs of Seniors and the Elderly: Fact Sheet

*Although there is no general agreement as to when a person becomes an older adult or senior, for the purpose of this fact sheet we will use 65 years of age and older as the general definition since it is roughly the retirement age of most persons.*

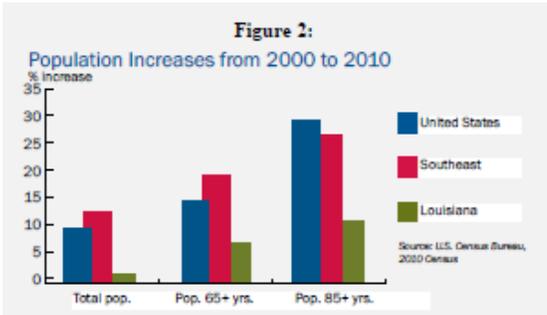
## Introduction

Housing is very important in the lives of the senior population – it is a place of memories and a connection to family, friends, and neighbors. The affordability of housing affects how seniors will afford food and health care, among other needs. Housing close to nearby services like healthcare facilities, shopping, transportation, and recreational facilities can enhance the quality of life for seniors. Housing with supportive physical designs that accommodate the needs of older adults make it possible for persons to ‘age in place’.

As a result of the “Baby Boomer” generation reaching retirement age, seniors make up the fastest growing population in the United States. The expanding senior population should be of particular interest to housing policy as this demographic is expected to accelerate rapidly and has housing needs that differ from the younger population. The demand for safe, quality, affordable, and accessible housing will only increase as this population retire and live longer on fixed incomes (Figure 1).



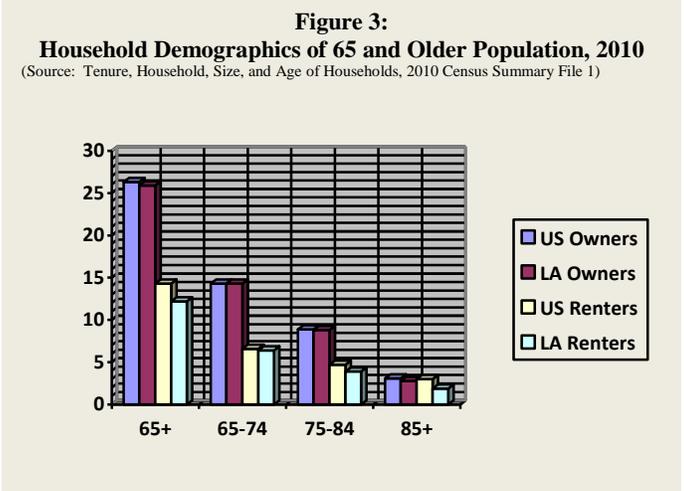
The 2010 Census released the Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics for Louisiana revealing that the 65 and older population was 557,857 or 12.3% percent of the total state population, of whom the majority was between 65 and 75 years of age. Although Louisiana is experiencing growth in the 65 and older population just like many other states in the nation, the older population in Louisiana is growing at a much slower pace compared to the national and regional averages (Figure 2). According to the *Louisiana National Migration in National and Historic Context*, this slower growth rate is related to the loss of population after Hurricane’s Katrina and Rita.



### Housing Characteristics of the 65 and Older Population in Louisiana

Already, over one-quarter (25.9%) of Louisiana households include households owned by someone 65 or older compared to the national average of 26.3% of households owners (Figure 3). Of the 557,857 adults 65 and older living in households in Louisiana, 83.3% were homeowners and 16.7% were renters in 2010, compared to the national average of 78.9% homeowners and 21.1% renters who were age 65 and older.

**Aging in Place.** A large number of seniors want to age in place – meaning they prefer to live independently in their homes and communities for as long as they can, as they get older. Census data shows that



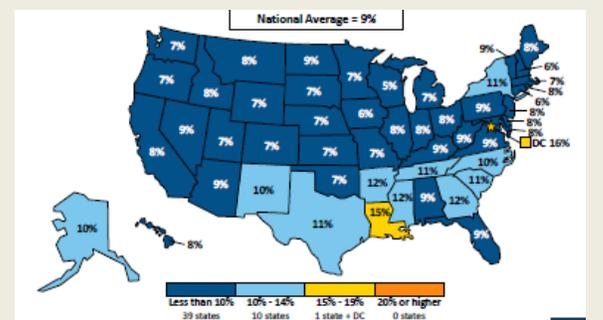
older adults rarely move. On average, only 5.2% of Louisiana seniors moved in 2012 with the majority of these movers remaining in the same parish. As people in Louisiana become older, aging in place offers our state a strategy to reduce blight and abandonment by enabling seniors to remain in their homes.

**Very few seniors live in long-care facilities**, like nursing homes, or assisted living communities. In Louisiana, less than 5% of the senior population lived in nursing homes. According to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, approximately 2% lived in some type of assisted living community. However, the numbers are higher for seniors 85 and older and the costs are even higher. According to the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA), the national average of a private room in a nursing home is \$74,065 annually while the national average of an assisted living facility is \$39,132. That average cost is much higher in urban areas like New Orleans where assisted living facilities averaged a monthly cost of \$3620, an approximate annual cost of \$43,440.

## Housing Challenges Faced by Senior Population

**Most Seniors have Very Low Incomes and Rely on Social Security.** As adults become older and retire, their incomes often do not keep pace with housing costs. Housing costs, especially for those on fixed incomes, pose an affordability problem for many older persons, especially in Louisiana. Nationally, about 9% of individuals 65 and older have incomes below the official poverty measure used by the

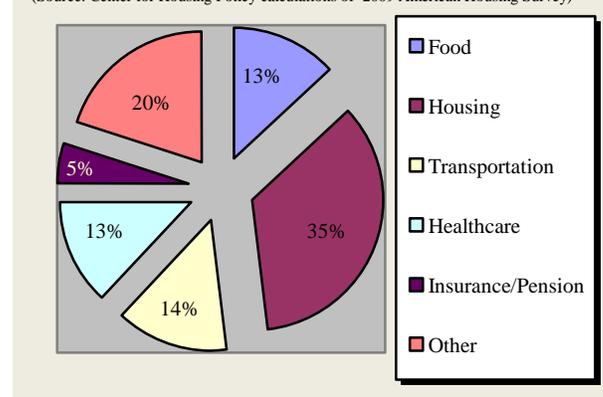
**Figure 4: Percent of Individuals Ages 65 and Older with Incomes Below 100% of the Official Poverty Threshold, by State, 2009-2011**  
(Source: Current Population Survey, 2009-2011, Annual Social & Economic Supplement)



It is important to note that approximately 90% of the income of the 65 and older population in Louisiana and the United States comes from Social Security (Figure 5). This reliance on Social Security income emphasizes the limited resources available to these households.

**Housing Cost Burdens Increase for Seniors.** As households grow older, their housing cost burdens increase. Older adult households are more likely to spend 30% or more of their incomes on housing. In Louisiana, 20.2% of seniors that were homeowners and 47.2% that were renters spent 30% or more of their income on housing costs. A HUD report stated that senior renters had the most housing need as they earned less than 1/2 of the median income in the area they lived, did not have housing assistance, paid more than 1/2 of their income on rent and lived in severely inadequate housing (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Expense Categories as a Share of Total Household Expenditure for Seniors**  
(Source: Center for Housing Policy calculations of 2009 American Housing Survey)



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## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Louisiana is experiencing growth in the 65 and older population.
- 25.9% of Louisiana households are owned by seniors.
- In Louisiana, 20.2% of seniors that were homeowners and 47.2% of seniors that were renters spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs.
- In 2012, 12.5% of Louisiana's senior population lived below the official poverty threshold compared to national average of 9.4%.
- 90% of senior income comes from Social Security, which limits resources to these households.
- 43.3% of non-institutionalized seniors in Louisiana have some type of disability.

**Figure 5: Senior Income in Past 12 Months**  
(Source: American Community Survey 2008-2012)

	LA	US
w/Earnings	36%	34.6%
Social Security Income	89.9%	91.5%
Retirement	43.2%	48.8%
Supplemental Security Insurance	8%	5.8%
Cash Public Assistance	1.1%	1.7%
Food Stamps/SNAP	11.8%	7.5%

**Disability.** Persons with disabilities are more likely to live in homes that do not meet their needs and are least likely to afford suitable housing with necessary accommodations. Unfortunately, staying at home will be a challenge for many seniors as 43.3% of the non-institutionalized senior population in Louisiana has some type of disability – difficulty with hearing, vision, and/or mobility. According to an AARP survey, 12% of respondents indicated their home would not be able to accommodate them as they grow older.

## POLICY

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Reduce cost for existing homes.** Provide property tax relief programs, retain homestead exemption, or allow property tax deferral for senior homeowners on fixed and limited incomes and provide housing vouchers and rental subsidies to help seniors alleviate rental cost burdens.
- **Fund home modifications.** Provide funding from Community Block Grants, housing trust funds, or zero and low interest home modifications to improve accessibility and safety features in homes for older adults – like widening doorways for wheelchair accessibility, installing handrails, and adding a first floor bedroom and bathroom.
- **Revisit zoning policies.** Restrictive zoning policies can make it difficult to build smaller, affordable, multifamily homes in residential areas which would allow aging adults to remain in their communities, closer to health care and social service organizations, public transit system, and shopping centers.
- **Supportive housing.** Moving nursing home residents into lower-cost supportive community living situations can be a solution to rising cost of elderly care.
- **State support.** Invest in the Louisiana Housing Trust Fund.