

Service to Seniors: Meeting the Needs of a Growing Segment

A recent *PublishersWeekly.com* feature states that one American turns 50 years old every seven minutes. Although it is not news that a large segment of the population is "graying," it may be surprising to learn how large the mature adult population in Colorado grew recently and is projected to grow in the next five years. People tend to think of Colorado as a "young" state. While it is true that Colorado ranks 47th in the country in its resident population over 65, it will still soon see a major population shift. Since 1997, Colorado's population over the age of 60 increased by 5 percent. In the next five years the over-60 group is projected to increase over 17 percent! See Table 1:

With the senior population comprising 13 percent of the total in Colorado, public libraries already notice an increase in services to this segment of the community. Results from a *USA Today* survey in 1999 showed that people over 65 spend more time reading than any other age group—more than one hour and fifteen minutes per day. Many seniors on fixed incomes rely on their public libraries to supply this reading material, often in large print editions.

**Table 1: Over 60 Population
Colorado 1997-2005**

1997	525,574
1998	537,441
1999	549,453
2000	551,305
2001	575,892
2002	590,328
2003	607,052
2004	625,808
2005	645,632

Publishers now offer a range of genres, bestsellers and classics in large print. This wasn't always the case. Bestsellers previously came out in large print six months to one year after the first printing. Where many once offered only limited titles in larger font sizes, they now publish hundreds and thousands of titles. Thorndike Press, one of the largest producers of large print, has published these books since 1978. That year its list included 48 titles. In 2000, Thorndike plans to publish over 1,000 large print titles.

Although public library statistics for mature adults are not collected, read any library discussion list archive and it is undeniable that seniors are an easily identifiable and reachable audience. Services include everything from books-by-mail, services to homebound, Internet and computer classes, Read Aloud to the Elderly programs, nursing home outreach and more.

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Many reasons can be cited for paying attention to mature adult patrons. The foremost reason is the basic tenet of librarianship – to serve your constituents. In addition, seniors tend to be politically active. When budgets get tight, librarians need this substantial voting population to realize the value of their public libraries and to continue or boost funding.

Whether your public library is going through planning, policy changes or taking a hard look at collection development, checking population trends in your county is a good idea. The Census Bureau Website lists county population by age at http://www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/co_ca.html with the Colorado data for 1998 at <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/county/ca/caco98.txt>.

Resources

Colorado Department of Local Affairs. "Colorado County Population Projections." <Http://www.dola.state.co.us/demog/widepro1.cfm> (Accessed 8/1/00)

Dyer, Lucinda. "I Can See Clearly Now." *PublishersWeekly.com*. 7/30/00
http://www.publishersweekly.com/articles/20000731_88395.asp (Accessed 8/1/00).

United States Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/> (Accessed 8/1/00)