

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Census shows Calif. median age at record, SF older

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Californians are grayer on the whole, and under the crushing forces of foreclosures and a bad economy, more of them are living with relatives than a decade ago, newly compiled U.S. census figures show.

Statistics being released today from the 2010 census reveal that the median age of Californians rose from 33.3 in 2000 to 35.2. That's the oldest in state history, said Jon Stiles, studies director at UC Berkeley's Census Research Data Center.

Fueling the rise was a large increase in the number of people approaching retirement age - the Baby Boom generation.

The number of people ages 55 to 64 in the state shot up from 2.6 million to 4 million in the past decade, and the group now constitutes 10.8 percent of the state's population. Experts in senior affairs say the future for this graying demographic is not rosy.

### **A growing wave**

"We have a longevity revolution happening, and in San Francisco we're calling it 'the silver tsunami,'" said Valorie Villela, director of the 30th Street Senior Center. "It's hitting hard, and once again our society is not prepared."

She said her research shows that by 2025 in San Francisco, 1 in 5 people will be older than 65 and the number of people older than 85 will have doubled. That trend is coming at a time when the state has been running huge deficits year after year, forcing cuts to services such as adult day care and Medi-Cal.

"It's scary," said Villela, who is 57 and has worked at 30th Street for 29 years. "People aren't saving enough for their retirement, and the recession wiped out a lot of those savings. We're living longer, and we spend more money than we have as a whole. It doesn't help that we tend to be a culture that is focused on youth."

## **S.F., Marin older still**

The census reports that San Francisco is even older than the state as a whole, with the median age shooting from 36.5 in 2000 to 38.5 now. That telling demographic of 55- to 64-year-olds went from 8.4 percent of the city's population to 12 percent, or in real figures, from 65,284 people to 96,596.

The trend held true for all nine Bay Area counties, with one minor exception. The percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds in Santa Clara County was 10.4 percent, slightly less than the state's, though its median age of 36.2 was higher.

Marin County had the oldest median age in the Bay Area, at 44.5, as well as the greatest percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds, 15.9 percent.

In the rest of the state, high-growth areas such as the Central Valley skewed younger, and traditional retirement enclaves found in some forested and mountainous regions were grayer.

Tiny Alpine County high in the Sierra Nevada, for instance, had a median age of 46.7, while burgeoning San Joaquin County's median age was just 32.7.

## **Not enough services**

Despite government cutbacks, there is a broader range of services available to seniors than in years past - from 30th Street's classes on how to avoid falls to holistic art classes at the AgeSong residential center in Hayes Valley. But it's nowhere near enough to keep up with the oncoming silver-haired waves, many say.

"Aging is happening in all developed countries, not just here, and we are not prepared well for it," said Richard Walker, an economic geographer at UC Berkeley. "Here it gets put in terms of the Baby Boomers, but it's more than that. We are just living longer and having fewer babies."

Reductions in public funding for senior services, experts say, are part of what's behind another statistic in today's census report: the increase in multigenerational families bunking down together.

## **Multigenerational homes**

The number of Californians who told the census they are living with relatives other than members of immediate families shot up 27 percent, from 2.8 million to 3.6 million. They now represent 9.7 percent of the state's population.

"There are at least a couple of reasons for this," said Hans Johnson, a demographer at the Public Policy Institute of California. "One is that immigrants are more likely to live in multigenerational households, and another is that when people face economic hard times, they are more likely to move in with relatives."

Figures released in March showed a sharp increase in the state's ethnic populations, particularly Asian Americans and Latinos.

Given the recession and wave of statewide foreclosures, "there is nothing surprising in these statistics," Johnson said.

Hard times also drove up the number of vacant housing units in California, experts said.

### **8.1% of housing vacant**

The census shows the state had 1.1 million vacant housing units in 2010, a 55 percent explosion from 712,000 in 2000. Those units now represent 8.1 percent of the state's housing. In 2000, it was 5.8 percent.

"This reflects how there was massive overbuilding in the housing bubble in the beginning of the decade," Walker said. "It's not just the foreclosures that have caused this number. California was building more than any other state, so it crashed harder, and this figure is a mark of the disaster we've had here.

"The only thing comparable to what happened is the big bubble of commercial buildings we had in the early 1990s, when you could drive through parts of Silicon Valley and have so many empty buildings you could see through them," Walker said. "Now you can see through houses."

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/05/12/MN1G1JEI9J.DTL>

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