The Kansas City metropolitan area’s older adult population is expected to nearly double over the next 20 years from almost 219,000 people in 2010 in the nine metro counties to over 416,000 by 2030, a 90 percent increase. Local communities, nonprofit organizations, businesses and other institutions are not fully prepared to respond to this demographic trend. Our region needs to increase its capacity to support healthy lifestyles and health care for an aging population, to adequately house and support our seniors’ ability to age in place, to offer mobility options that support independent living, to provide quality caregiving options, and to offer opportunities for social and civic engagement. These capacities will ensure that our region is a place where all individuals enjoy a high quality of life.

KC Communities for All Ages, formerly known as KC 4 Aging in Community, was formed in 2008 to coordinate a community response to the future needs of this coming “age wave.”

Resources
*Study conducted by the Heartland EngAGEment Initiative 2012. Data analysis for this report was completed by the Midwestern Center for Nonprofit Leadership at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Data was provided by the Mid-America Regional Council and from the sources cited below.

Stanford Center on Longevity, “New Realities of an Older America”
Department of Health and Human Services, “A Profile of Older Americans: 2011”
AARP Public Policy Institute Fact Sheet, “The New Reality: Important Facts about America’s Seniors”
Metro Kansas City Senior Population Statistics Underscore Demographic Shift and Need for More Data

Just as baby boomers redefined major aspects of society, such as public education, work and leisure in the second half of the 20th century, they will similarly redefine it in the 21st century. Data for this metro demographic description was taken from the 2010 U.S. Census Report. However, limitations remain in our ability to project population trends over the next 30 years.

Given these conditions, what can we surmise about Greater Kansas City’s 65 and over population today, tomorrow, 20 and 30 years from now, and what information will we need to prepare for these demographic changes?

Despite improvements, data limitations about the 65 and over population remain an impediment to community planning. Some of the more glaring gaps in existing data from greater Kansas City include:

- Data between census years – Information in this report was taken from the recent 2010 Census data. In subsequent years, finding accurate data to provide annual updates will be a challenge.

- City projec tions – The ability to project senior populations within cities continues to be a barrier. Much of the planning needed to address the emerging issues incumbent with the growing senior population occurs at the municipal level. Limited projections data hinders the ability of planners to prepare for the future with specific strategies.

- Demographics of public transportation users – Present ridership statistics do not segregate seniors from the general population. Tracking ridership of traditional and paratransit public services would allow communities to estimate unmet need.

- Housing trends – Census data provides some information on existing housing for older adults. Moving forward, we are also interested in the factors that influence housing choices. Why do individuals choose to relocate to a specific area?

- Nursing and assisted care facilities – Planning for older adult housing will demand an accurate appraisal of existing capacity. Capacity assessments should also consider the ability of a given facility to provide full services to adults with severe disabilities.

As a country, we are definitely getting older. We know, for example, that:

- the number of people 65 and over will double from 40 million in 2010 to 81 million in 2040.
- 29 percent of people over 65 live alone.
- at least 89 percent of seniors age 65+ intend to remain in their homes.
- one in six, or 16.8 percent, of people 65 and over live in poverty.
- education levels of older people are increasing.
- at least 89 percent of seniors age 65+ intend to remain in their homes.
- the number of people 65 and over will double from 40 million in 2010 to 81 million in 2040.

A recent study* of existing data sources about the senior population in Greater Kansas City all point to three conclusions that likely apply to other metropolitan areas.

- Thirty years from now, Kansas City is going to look a lot more like Florida, demographically speaking.
- Planners, policy makers and the private funding community are receiving timely advice to plan for the coming age wave, but it is unknown whether they will act quickly enough to adequately prepare.
- More data and analysis are desperately needed to be prepared for a demographic shift that will transform every aspect of community life.

Housing

The housing needs of an expanding older population will require the community to renovate residential properties to better accommodate the needs of those who wish to continue to live in their existing homes and neighborhoods, and to support the construction of new housing in locations and of types to meet their diverse needs. KC Communities for All Ages will encourage appropriate housing renovations and promote new housing choices in accessible locations.

Transportation and Mobility

To live independently, older Americans must be able to maintain a mobile lifestyle. Mid-America Regional Council’s Transportation Department and KC Communities for All Ages will work with the Mr. Goodcents Foundation, University of Missouri-Kansas City Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership, the University of Kansas Medical Center and others to increase transportation and mobility options for older adults, and to ensure that transportation services are designed in ways that fully meet the needs of an increasingly older population.

Social and Civic Engagement

As the baby boomer generation moves toward retirement years, many will desire or require continued employment, but in different settings and at a differing pace. The expertise offered by this potential employee-base could be of great benefit to employers across the region. KC Communities for All Ages will work with existing organizations to identify ways for these older adults to become involved and contribute, to engage in life-long learning and maintain important social connections.

Caregiving

The dramatic increase in the number of frail elderly in the next 20 years will require a larger caregiver workforce and more support for family and friends who care for older parents, relatives and friends. KC Communities for All Ages will continue to support the development of a quality professional workforce, as well as support for family members and friends on how to offer care, as well as how to choose caregivers, to best meet the needs of the frail elderly.

Health Care

The larger older adult population in metropolitan Kansas City will require more health care services, although access to healthier lifestyles and preventive care could help reduce needed services. The KC Communities for All Ages initiative will work with regional partners to promote healthy lifestyles and preventive care.

Public Education

KC Communities for All Ages will continue to educate the community around the needs of an expanding older adult population and what steps individuals, organizations, employers and communities should take in response to this demographic trend.

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