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Are we prepared? Senior population expected to skyrocket, even in shrinking Detroit



Katie Bailey | MLive.com Mary Ann Humphries, 82, stands on a stairway at St. Patrick's Senior Center, Tuesday, May 27, 2014. A resident of the city since 1938, Humphries said her top concern is seniors' safety on the streets of Detroit. The thing that has kept her in Detroit: "Fellowship."

[Katie Bailey | MLive.com](#)

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By [Khalil AlHajjal | kalhajal@mlive.com](#)

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DETROIT, MI – Sometime in the next few years, the number of people over the age of 65 in southeast Michigan is expected to surpass the number of residents 18 and under.

“I don’t think that has happened before in human history,” said Thomas Jankowski, associate research director at Wayne State University’s Institute of Gerontology, citing population figures from the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

“Overall population will stay relatively stable, but the number of younger folks is going to decrease as they age out of their age group, and the number of older folks is going to increase dramatically.”

And that means local governments will have to brace for skyrocketing expectations for accommodating larger senior populations, ranging from improvements in housing and transit options to expansion of recreation and health programming, said Jankowski.

The growth of senior populations is taking place around the nation, but the proportions appear especially pronounced in Michigan.

Residents over the age of 65 are expected to make up about 23.9 percent of the region’s population by 2040, compared to about 13 percent currently, according to SEMCOG. The percentage of seniors is also expected to rise nationally, but only to 19.6 by 2040.

“People are leaving to find jobs, and they’re leaving mom and dad behind for the most part,” Jankowski said.



Tom Jankowski

*Wayne State
University*

Even in Detroit, which has been hemorrhaging residents for decades and is projected to lose another 7 percent of its population over the next 25 years, the aging of the baby boomer generation is expected to send the number of seniors living in the city soaring.

The projected increase, according to SEMCOG, is 42 percent in Detroit, which is already burdened by bankruptcy, potential cuts to retiree pensions and ongoing battles to address crime, blight and unlit neighborhoods.

Mayor Mike Duggan says he wants to establish a senior services department dedicated to tackling the needs of older residents, but he can’t -- at least not yet, not while the city remains in bankruptcy court and under control of a state-appointed emergency manager.

“At the moment, under the city's financial constraints, we don't have the ability to establish a department solely dedicated to Senior citizen related issues,” said Duggan’s spokesman John Roach. “It's something the mayor has said he wants to do as soon as he can once he has full control over city finances. In the meantime, he is focused on delivering services that improve the quality of life for all residents, including seniors, such as bus service, neighborhood improvements, improving EMS response times and recreational opportunities.”

Jankowski said it's an issue that's staring down every municipal government in the region.

“I think that cities are going to have to put more resources into their older populations,” he said. “You have to start thinking about what you're going to do... And it makes sense to do it for a number of reasons.”

The reasons include both cost savings and potential return on investment, Jankowski said.

“If you enable people to live safely and independently in the community and give them services to be able to get around and remain actively engaged ... then you can get an awful lot back from that population as well,” he said, “especially with the baby boomers.

“We have the best-educated, wealthiest, healthiest older population that we've ever had. We have a lot of people who are in great shape, have a lot of skills, are sharp as a tack and can give back.”

But the savings that could come from boosting senior services may not always directly benefit local governments.

It's much cheaper to provide seniors in-home care than it is to put them in nursing homes, Jankowski said, and preventative health care is much less expensive than emergency treatment, but those savings are ultimately realized by Medicare and hospitals, not local budgets.

“That makes it hard to do a cost benefit analysis that's going to please the city people,” he said.

Still, the cost of not preparing for the rise of the elder population could go beyond finances.

“There's a huge human cost to have people in your community who don't have proper housing and nutrition and don't have health needs cared for,” Jankowski said.

MLive Detroit, in partnership with WDET and ModelD, will be reporting about the region's senior population and efforts to accommodate its growth in a series of stories titled [Aging Together](#) over the coming weeks. Check out the opening story [here](#), and a stirring set of portraits from one of Detroit's senior communities [here](#).

Follow MLive Detroit reporter Khalil AlHajal on [Twitter @DetroitKhalil](#) or on [Facebook at Detroit Khalil](#). He can be reached at kalhajal@mlive.com or 313-643-0527.

What aging issues are you or loved ones dealing with? [Share your input and experiences](#) with the "Aging Together" team and help bring attention to aging-related issues in Detroit, Metro Detroit, and across Michigan.



*Ageing Together is a summer-long project between **MLive Detroit**, **WDET 101.9FM Detroit** and **Model D Media** that explores the issues of older adults in Detroit, Southeast Michigan and the state.*



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Rick Snyder has sold out Senior Citizens
Taxing their pensions

Taking their pension checks by disregarding the CONSTITUTION OF MICHIGAN
Eliminating their home ownership tax credit.....
subjecting millions of Seniors into POVERTY.

The ENEMY OF SENIOR CITIZENS IS REPUBLICAN RICK SNYDER.

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 **i3usdriver** 16 hours ago

Politicians aren't known to prepare for the future. They would never get elected. They always go short term because that's what the masses want.

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Dustin Block | dblock@mlive.com

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[@i3usdriver](#) Michigan term limits don't help with this.

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 **working4good** 22 hours ago

Let's see. . . Older adults would like to have a safe place to live, well-lit streets, safe communities, places to gather, and food on the table. Hmm. Sounds like they share the same priorities as the rest of us.

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22 hours ago

[@working4good](#) Very true. One difference we're finding is those basic needs are not always addressed or heard.

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Coolman48

22 hours ago

[@working4good](#) You are correct working4good. They paid their fair share during the last 45 years that they worked to achieve this. Will you do the same?

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[@working4good](#) on a fixed income with health issues big difference.

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 **Coolman48** 23 hours ago

I hear a lot of Republicans on this website state that it's only fair for seniors to pay pension tax. Believe me the senior voting block will not forget that comment come this November or in future elections.

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[@Coolman48](#) The issue of seniors as a political force is one we're considering. It could be a major shift in policy



discussions in the years to come, especially on issues like taxes.

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endstrong

22 hours ago

@Coolman48 what are you talking about? Unions put in a loop hole decades ago making pensions tax free from Mich income Tax. 7% of the population is still union, why should they get a tax break and the rest of us poor slobs have to pay? If a rich guy did this he would be pounded at this site. What a hypocrite to even suggest. The poor seniors having to pay tax on their pensions don't amount to a hill of beans as a voting block and you can't get them all anyway.

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Coolman48

22 hours ago

@endstrong In your dreams endstrong

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20 hours ago

@endstrong Get your facts straight under the old pension tax everyone benefitted except from the old law: Private pensions are exempt up to \$45,120 for individuals and up to \$90,240 for married couples filing jointly. (However, these private-pension exemptions are reduced by any public-pension deduction that is claimed.) That is now gone and why would you support a tax that was deemed unneeded by the former budget director, in an interview that they didn't need to tax pensions to balance the books. "We could have balanced the budget without taxing pensions," Nixon said. excerpt from Jackson Citizen Patriot 20 June 2011.

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Coolman48

19 hours ago

@pavlov's dog trainer @endstrong Thanks pavlov;s dog trainer, very well said.

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trebor

23 hours ago

Hope they are ready to pay Snyder's new pension tax as well.

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Dustin Block | dblock@mlive.com

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@trebor A story on Michigan taxes for seniors, compared to other states, is a good idea. How retirement friendly is the nation? We'll find out.

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@Dustin Block | dblock@mlive.com @trebor Studies have been done and under Snyders senior care we went from one of the 10 best places (according to kiplinger 2011) to retire in to one of the worst.

Excerpt:If you're a senior living in Michigan you might consider relocating. The Great Lakes state is the worst for retirees. Why? From the report(MoneyRates.com):

Michigan ranked below average in every category, and particularly low scores on climate and economic factors hurt the state's ranking. Michigan was not among the 10 worst states in any single category, but consistently low scores across the board gave it the worst overall total.

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/halahtouryalai/2012/10/26/the-best-and-worst-states-for-retirement/>

<http://www.topretirements.com/blog/great-towns/10-worst-states-for-retirement-for-2014.html/>

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Dustin Block | dblock@mlive.com

2 hours ago

[@nashv's dog trainer](#) Thank you. We're taking a closer look at this.

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embarrassed

1 day ago

Bring on the "school lunch" type meals at the senior center, Saturday night bingo, and bus trips to the dollar store and the casinos....I'm ready!

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Dustin Block | dblock@mlive.com

23 hours ago

[@embarrassed](#) Let's hope for more than that! I

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