



## Baby Boomers Changing the Senior Demographic

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As of Jan. 1, 2011 the oldest member of the Baby Boomer generation turned 65. On that day, roughly 10,000 Boomers turned 65 and 10,000 more will cross that threshold every day for the next 19 years (Pew Research Center). Considering that 26% of the total US population falls under the Boomer category, this will dramatically transform the health care industry by presenting new challenges and opportunities. Consider the following:

### Health Care System

The growth in the Boomer generation will pressure an already stressed health care system and shape the landscape for decades to come. This will be the most noticeable when a significant portion of Boomers switch from commercial health care plans to Medicare. According to MedPAC, the Medicare population is projected to increase from 54 million beneficiaries in 2016 to over 80 million beneficiaries by 2030. This expansion will have a profound impact on both the program and the taxpayers who support it. Additionally, experienced medical professionals will leave the workforce in increasing numbers, creating voids in clinical care and health care management. For instance, many nurses who hail from the Boomer generation will reach retirement age in higher numbers over the next several years. This will reduce the health care work force just as the demand for healthcare workers increases due to Boomer medical needs.

### Advances in Technology

Boomers' willingness to adapt to advances in technology will allow patient-managed technologies such as mobile health to flourish. Furthermore, the development of new care models combined with advances in technology will reduce healthcare costs. At the same time, technology will help Boomers live healthier, longer and independent lives. The push for technological advancement also comes at the heels of the Affordable Care Act, which has created a demand for innovation in improving care for elderly patients. Currently, Medicare is promoting and testing models that reward the value rather than volume of delivered care.

### Cultural and Social Values

Boomers' cultural and social values will create changes in health care that didn't exist with previous generations. The Boomer generation is more racially and ethnically diverse, which will create a demand

for sensitivity to cultural differences and changes in health care management. Tailoring initiatives that meet the needs of a diverse Boomer population must be implemented by hospitals in order to meet the needs of a generation with growing language and cultural differences. At the same time the Boomer generation is more educated than previous generations and, as a result, is savvier and will want to play a more interactive role in the health care decision-making process. Lifestyle differences also exist, as Boomers are more likely to maintain their mobility with age and insist on staying healthy and active for as long as possible. Because of this, Boomers will create a higher demand for services that allow them to live independently in their homes.

### **Tackling the Issues**

Baby Boomers are recognized as an informed and proactive group, but there is doubt that an adequate health care model will be available as they continue to age. Taking advantage of existing resources and planning for the ongoing changes in health care policy is crucial. Insurance companies and government officials are currently working to address this unavoidable issue. For the rest, tackling the problem head on is our best bet for ensuring our seniors age gracefully.

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