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Virginians over 65 to double, UVa study says

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The number of Virginians 65 or older is expected to double by 2030, according to a new report from the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service.

The report was compiled using U.S. Census Bureau data and was put together after a request last year by state legislators who wanted a briefing on the graying of Virginians.

According to the report, there are high concentrations of people 65 or older living in urban areas, in addition to a large population of the same demographic living in rural areas.

Richard Lindsay is a retired geriatrician who represents Albemarle County on the Jefferson Area Board for Aging. He said serving the larger, older population is going to be even more of a challenge in the future than it is today.

For one, Lindsay said, baby boomers are staying in their homes longer before going into a nursing or retirement home, if they go into one at all. And it's something that runs counter to tradition in the United States, Lindsay said. That, he said, will require modifications to houses and an increased reliance on health-care providers in the home and on family members.

And while the report finds that most elderly have health insurance, primarily through Medicare, health-care providers will be increasingly taxed by more patients with chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, Lindsay said.

"The biggest challenge is going to be providing the services to an increased amount of people," Dick Gibson Jr., chairman of JABA's Board of Directors, said of finding the money to fund additional services, especially in light of the recent economic downturn.

Gibson said getting the elderly out of their houses and into social environments, regardless of whether they live in rural or urban environments, will be key in maintaining a quality of life that promotes health. That will require transporting a population who in some cases may no longer drive.

“All of us need a reason for being,” Gibson said. “And if your reason for being is sitting there staring at a wall, that’s not fun.”