



# Research Highlights

## in the Demography and Economics of Aging

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## The NIA Demography Centers

The projected rapid rise in the numbers and proportion of older people, not only in the U.S. but worldwide, brings with it a number of opportunities and challenges, especially in the areas of health, retirement, disability, and family. These changes and their implications have never been more important.

To help inform public discussion of these issues, the National Institute on Aging (NIA) has initiated a new phase in its Centers program on the demography and economics of aging. Ten leading research institutions were recently awarded five-year grants to develop, support and coordinate a wide range of research activities. The Centers are charged with maintaining and improving the quality and relevance of information available to the public and policymakers as they address population aging.

Each of the NIA Demography Centers is characterized by its own focus or specialization. While all will investigate some aspect of the economic, health and health care, and social circumstances of older individuals and of society, each center will contribute its own expertise and perspective to the research. One new area of emphasis among several centers, for example, is the study of the biodemography of aging, which focuses on the biological foundations of longevity and the relationships among biology and genetics, health and mortality, life expectancy, and population demographics.

In addition to their specific research projects, the Centers are also designed to stimulate and enrich the scientific research community. They provide

resources for the collaboration and exchange of ideas among scholars; for the training and continuing intellectual development of investigators engaged in aging-related research; for the development of new data resources and new research initiatives; for the widespread dissemination of research findings outside of the Centers; and for the promotion of research on aging both in the U.S. and throughout the world.

### MAJOR RESEARCH AREAS

- Demographics and Population Research
- Biodemography, Longevity and Genetics
- Population, Economic and Policy Forecasting
- Health, Chronic Illness and Disability
- Health Care and Health Policy
- Income, Savings, Work and Retirement
- Family Support Systems
- Socioeconomic Status and Health
- Minority Populations
- Dementia / Alzheimer's Disease
- Comparative International Research

### CENTER ACTIVITIES

- Research on Aging
- Pilot Projects on Innovative Topics
- Data Resource Development
- Statistical Enclaves for Sensitive Data
- Methodological Research
- Training Programs
- Workshops and Conferences
- Newsletters and Reports
- Web-Based Information and Resources
- Multi-Disciplinary Collaborations
- International Collaborations

# THE TEN CENTERS

## UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

### **Center on the Economics and Demography of Aging**

The major themes of research at Berkeley are demographic forecasting, mortality, health and health care, economic demography, and population demography. For example, scientists are developing new forecasting methods to better project future trends in mortality, age demographics, and the financing of Social Security and other government programs. A related project focuses on family demography and the relationships among kin, such as the emergence of step and blended families, that will affect the elderly over the next several decades. In biodemography, Berkeley has developed research initiatives on genetics and the biological aspects of mortality among animal populations.

## UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO & NATIONAL OPINION RESEARCH CENTER (NORC)

### **Center on the Demography and Economics of Aging**

At the Chicago Center, research is being conducted on health policy, demography, biodemography, and the economics of aging. There is a strong emphasis on understanding the role of the family and family support for aging family members, as well as on historical studies of aging that draw on a valuable new database of 40,000 Union Army veterans. Other projects examine health insurance, the determinants and pathways leading to functional disability, hospice use and consequences, and the biological foundations of longevity. The Chicago Center brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars from the Harris School of Public Policy, the Pritzker School of Medicine, the Graduate School of Business, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), and the Departments of Sociology and Economics. The Chicago Center also features an international research partnership, with links to the Oxford Centre on Population Aging (in the UK) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

## DUKE UNIVERSITY

### **Center for Demographic Studies**

The Duke Center is engaged in research on the biodemography and medical demography of aging, population trends in chronic disease and disability, and the effects of health changes on health expenditures, as well as general demographic and economic issues in aging. Many of the activities at Duke are associated with the National Long-Term Care Survey (NLTC), a longitudinal database with information on health and functional ability for about 42,000 Medicare beneficiaries over five interview periods between 1982 and 1999. Duke is building on its previous research on trends in health and disability (see *Research Highlights, Issue 5*), and is now turning its attention to understanding the causes and implications of these trends. Duke is also developing a number of innovative survey applications, such as the use of biological data. Its international focus includes work with collaborators in Denmark, Germany, China, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

## **The National Institute on Aging**

The NIA, part of the National Institutes of Health in the Department of Health and Human Services, leads a broad scientific effort to understand aging and to find ways to extend healthy, active years of life. The NIA conducts and supports biomedical, social, and behavioral research; provides research training; and disseminates research findings and health information on aging processes, diseases, and other special problems and needs of older people. The Demography Centers are supported through NIA's Behavioral and Social Research Program, which focuses on how people and their families change with aging, on the interrelationships between older people and social institutions (e.g., the retirement and health care systems), and on the changing age composition of the population in the U.S. and worldwide.

## UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

### **Center on the Demography of Aging**

The major themes of research at the Michigan Center are: health, work and retirement; interactions between health and economic status over time; the health and economic status of diverse racial and ethnic populations; biodemography;

demography and economics of dementia; comparative international research; and the value of linked data and methods for ensuring confidentiality in research. Among the specific projects taking place at Michigan is a multi-faceted investigation of saving, wealth accumulation, income dynamics and the financial decisions of individuals and households as they approach and enter retirement. Internationally, Michigan has a series of projects on aging in developing countries. Michigan is also home to the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). These national surveys are widely recognized for their state-of-the-art design and high quality information on the health and economic circumstances of Americans at older ages. Michigan also houses the National Archive of Computerized Data on Aging (NACDA), the country's largest library of electronic data on aging. The Michigan Center brings together research taking place through the Population Studies Center, the Survey Research Center, and the Departments of Economics and Sociology. It also manages a cross-Centers web site with extensive information and search capabilities, at <http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/agingmeta/>.

#### NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH Center for Aging and Health Research

Major areas of research at the NBER Center deal with labor market behavior, the financial circumstances of people as they age, health and health care, and aging around the world. NBER brings together leading scholars in economics nationwide. Their coordinated research program on aging is addressing such issues as work and retirement decisions at older ages, saving for retirement, and the dynamics of health care costs. In addition to structuring a program on aging among economists in the U.S., an important aspect of the Center is to engage foreign scholars in the intellectual issues posed by an aging population, and the health and well-being of the elderly; and to stimulate collaborative cross-national research initiatives on aging (see *Research Highlights, Issue 2*). The NBER Center also provides coordinating support for the overall Centers program in the demography of aging, including the preparation of the *Research Highlights* series.

#### UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

#### Population Aging Research Center

The core themes of research at the Pennsylvania Center involve the study of mortality and health at older ages; the economics of pensions, retirement, work and health; aging in families and households and inter-generational relations; and the diversity of aging, in the U.S. and internationally. Major projects are underway on the biodemography of

Alzheimer's disease, racial and ethnic differences in health and mortality, the role of genetic endowments in aging, early life determinants of saving and retirement, the role of public and private pension programs, and transfer flows across three and four generation families. The Penn Center also is home to the Mexican Migration Project and the new Mexican Health and Aging Study. The Center brings together an interdisciplinary group of researchers from the University of Pennsylvania's Institute on Aging and the Alzheimer's Disease Center in the Medical School, the Boettner Center of Financial Gerontology in the School of Social Work, the Pension Research Council in the Wharton School of Business, and the Departments of Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, and Biology.

#### RAND CORPORATION

#### Center for the Study of Aging

RAND's focus is on the determinants of health and economic circumstances at older ages, particularly the complex relationships between health and economic circumstances. One group of projects looks primarily at savings and wealth and the evolution of economic circumstances over the course of life. Health-based studies are examining patterns of health change with age, trends in population health, and the role of health insurance. Another area of research aims to understand how personal health affects economic circumstances, and vice versa (see *Research Highlights, Issue 4*). RAND is also active in database development, including projects to improve the measurement of health and economic status in surveys like the HRS, and projects to develop new data on families, health and wealth in Malaysia, Indonesia and Bangladesh. The RAND Center also holds an annual summer institute program for new

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scholars in the demography, economics and epidemiology of aging and hosts a “mini-med” workshop that introduces social scientists to the biomedical aspects of aging.

#### STANFORD UNIVERSITY

### **Center on the Demography and Economics of Health and Aging**

A major theme of research at the Stanford Center is the evolution of medical care in the U.S. Using large, linked, longitudinal databases, researchers are exploring the composition and evolving patterns of medical practices, health care costs, and health outcomes, focusing particularly on the implications of new medical technology. As part of its activities in health care, the Stanford Center is investigating methods for dealing with problems of complexity and confidentiality in the use of health data for research in economics and demography. Research is also being conducted at Stanford on the economics of retirement and demographic change. In addition, Stanford is developing two international networks, one to study the consequences of changes in medical technology and one devoted to genetic and behavioral factors in demographic change and their consequences for policy.

#### UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES

### **Center on Biodemography and Population Health**

The USC-UCLA Center specializes in research on population health, bringing together demographers, biologists, epidemiologists and clinical geriatricians. The USC-UCLA Center plans to draw on research findings in the health sciences, and then apply the tools and perspectives in demography to evaluate the implications of these findings for population health. By integrating biological, epidemiological, and medical risk information in this way, researchers hope to improve projections of demographic trends in population health and to better evaluate interventions that may improve population health. The USC-UCLA team will look at the effects of social, behavioral, and medical factors on population health; the interdependence of chronic illness, functional disability, and mortality; potential changes in disease prevalence and functional disability over time; and the causes of racial, socioeconomic, and gender differences in health at older ages.

#### UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON

### **Center for Demography of Health and Aging**

A major theme of research at the Wisconsin Center deals with midlife development and aging, drawing in part on the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS), a periodic survey of over 10,000 men and women who graduated from Wisconsin high schools in 1957. Plans are being made for a new follow-up survey in 2002, when the graduates will be 63 to 65 years old. Researchers are also studying the economics of population aging, including analyses of how population aging will affect the Social Security system, and how it will affect the economic well being of older Americans in the future. Another area of research at Wisconsin focuses on variations in health and longevity across the population, and their relationship to geography, socioeconomic status, and family circumstances. The Wisconsin Center is also engaged in a number of international, comparative studies of population aging, including several ongoing projects on aging in Latin America and the Caribbean.

## **CORE MISSIONS**

An important objective of NIA in establishing the Demography Centers program is to provide a research infrastructure that can serve not just the Centers themselves, but the larger community of investigators engaged in research on aging. The Centers program is also designed to stimulate new and innovative research applications, to develop new data resources and approaches to accessing data, and to attract new investigators to research on aging. The Centers will concentrate on:

- **Program Development.** Each Center has a “program development core,” designed to promote exploratory research on innovative topics in aging. The pilot initiatives undertaken through these cores often lay the foundation for more comprehensive research projects in new topic areas. In some Centers, program development also encompasses the recruitment of new investigators toward research on aging, and the continuing career development of established scholars.
- **Training.** Most Centers have NIA-supported training programs that are closely linked to the research activities. Pre- and post-doctoral fellowships enable new investigators

to gain experience in aging-related research in an environment with a diversity of ongoing research projects on aging, with regular interactions and connections to a network of highly accomplished research scholars in aging, and with convenient access to data and other resources. Such training helps ensure continuing entry of highly qualified new scholars into the field of aging research.

- **Data Resources.** Each Center is a leader in developing and managing data resources on aging. The contributions of the Centers include administering major surveys of older people both in the U.S. and abroad, maintaining data libraries for the research community, initiating and designing new surveys, supplementing existing surveys, formulating and evaluating experimental survey questions and techniques, linking data from multiple sources, and managing data use environments to protect potentially sensitive data.

- **Workshops and Conferences.** A wide range of seminars, workshops, and conferences on aging take place through the Centers. These include weekly seminar series, annual “summer institutes,” data use workshops, and formal research conferences. The Centers also sponsor various meetings of international scholars, fostering cross-national comparisons and international collaboration in the study of aging. These diverse activities assure the continuing interaction of a broad network of investigators engaged in aging-related research throughout the world.

- **Research Dissemination.** Many Centers disseminate research findings through non-technical reports as well as through academic journals and books. *Research Highlights in the Demography and Economics of Aging* is produced by the Centers, and summarizes research findings from the Centers program as a whole. (*Research Highlights* can be viewed on the web at [http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/aging/meta/res\\_high.html](http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/aging/meta/res_high.html).) Other Center-based newsletters are the *HRS/AHEAD Research Reports* (Michigan), *Research Reports on the Comparative Study of the Elderly in Asia* (Michigan), *NBER Digest*, and *RAND Research Briefs*. Also, the Wisconsin Center manages a daily and weekly electronic mailing service of news and information on aging. (For more information or to subscribe to this service, visit the Wisconsin web site at [www.ssc.wisc.edu/cdha/caar/caar-index.htm](http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/cdha/caar/caar-index.htm).)

### LARGE-SCALE DATA COLLECTION AND DATABASE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Berkeley . . . . .	.Linked Database of Death Records and Micro-Census Information
Chicago . . . . .	.Union Army Life History Data
Duke . . . . .	.National Long-Term Care Survey
Michigan . . . . .	.Health and Retirement Study, Panel Study of Income Dynamics, National Archive of Computerized Data on Aging
Pennsylvania . . . . .	.African Demographic Census Project, Mexican Migration Project, Mexican Health and Aging Study, Twin-Sibling Data
RAND . . . . .	.Family Life Surveys (Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh)
Wisconsin . . . . .	.Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, National Survey of Families and Households

- **Statistical Data Enclaves.** Several Centers are developing “statistical data enclaves” where researchers can analyze sensitive data under highly restricted and secure conditions. These secure environments make it possible for researchers to gain access to detailed information on finances, health and medical care, and geographic environments, which is critical to understanding a diversity of research questions in aging.

- **International Collaborations.** Most of the Centers have developed international networks of research scholars. With population aging taking place throughout the world, there is much to be learned from cross-national comparisons, drawing on the differences across countries in aging-related trends, institutional histories, and public policies. Collectively, the Centers have research projects or collaborative affiliations involving dozens of counties from most every part of the world.

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The National Institute on Aging supports 10 research centers on the demography and economics of aging, based at the University of California at Berkeley; the University of Chicago; Duke University; the University of Michigan; the National Bureau of Economic Research; the University of Pennsylvania; RAND Corporation; Stanford University; the University of Southern California and the University of California at Los Angeles; and the University of Wisconsin. *Research Highlights in the Demography and Economics of Aging* is prepared as a cooperative activity of these centers. The editor is Richard Woodbury (RGWoodbury@aol.com). For further information about the centers and to view other issues of *Research Highlights*, please visit the all-centers web site at <http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/agingmeta/>.