Population Health Vital Statistics Brief:

Seniors in Summit County, 2014-2020

August 2023

The *Population Health Vital Statistics Data Brief* series was created to provide regular updates to the Community Health Assessment and to provide the community with additional important information about population health. For more information on the Community Health Assessment and to access other reports in the *Vital Statistics Data Brief* series, please visit scph.org/assessments-reports

Seniors In Summit County

Summit County was home to approximately 102,000 seniors, defined here as people age 65 or older in 2021. Those 102,000 people accounted for over 18% of Summit County's population on average during the past 5 years. Due to the aging of the Baby Boom generation, the percentage of seniors is expected to continue rising sharply in the coming years.

Senior Population Projections -- Estimates of the 65 and older population for all Ohio counties published by the Ohio Development Services Agency projects Summit County's senior population to peak in 2035 at about 22% of the total population; nearly 116,000 people. Summit County's senior population appeared to be growing at a faster rate than predicted based on American Community Survey estimates (Figure 2). The decline in the senior population observed from 2020 to 2021 is likely attributable to the impact of COVID-19; in those two years, nearly 1,200 seniors died of COVID-19.

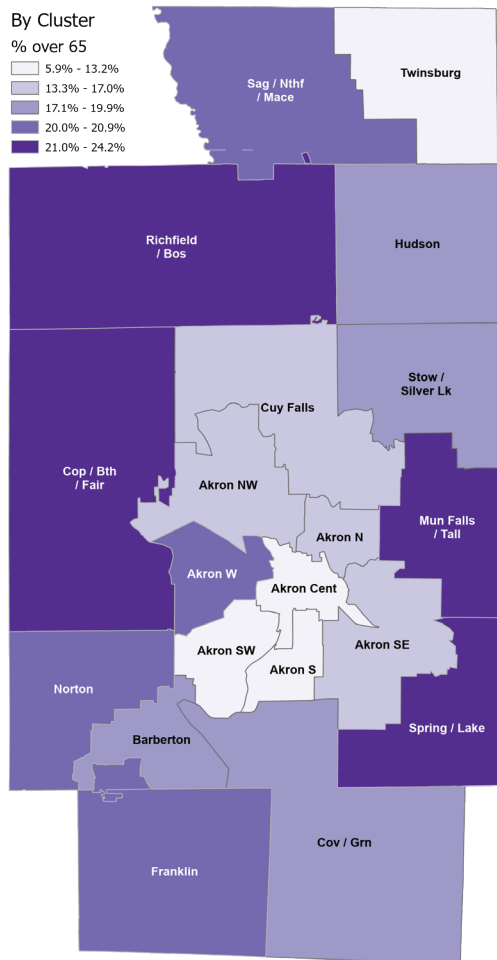**Figure 1: Seniors As A Percent of Total Population by Summit 2020 Cluster**. *Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year average.*
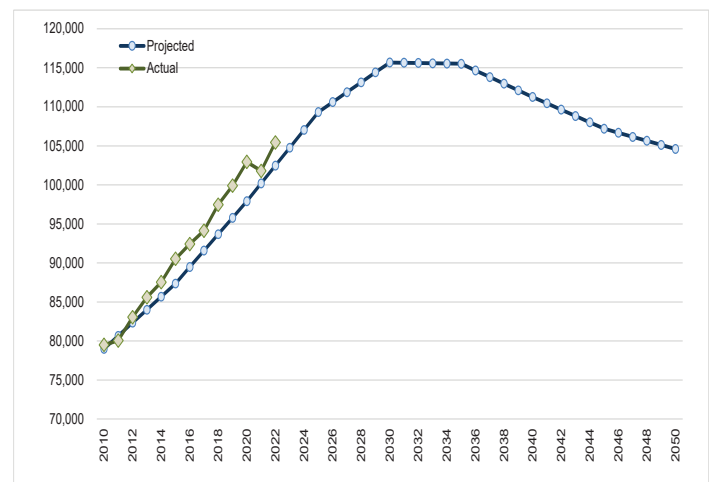

Figure 2: Share of Population Over Age 65 in Summit County, 2010-2050 Projection. *Source: Ohio Development Services Agency, 2017-2021 ACS 5-year average.*

Senior Demographic Profile

Figure 3 presents a comprehensive demographic profile of the 65 and older population in Summit County from the 2017-2021 American Community Survey (ACS). Details on several indicators can be found below:

- Age, sex, and race -- The median age of seniors in Summit County is 72.8 years; lower than 2010's figure of 75.3. This decline was due to the rapid increase in the 65 and older population caused by the aging of the Baby Boom generation.   Most seniors are female (56%), which is higher than the total population figure of 51%. A higher percentage of seniors are white (86%) than the total population (82%). Only 11% of seniors are African-American; lower than the percentage of African-Americans in the total population (15%). Asians make up 1.5% of the 65 and older population; about half their proportion in the total population (5%).

- Disability status -- Nearly one-third of seniors (32%) have at least one disability. Of those with a disability, 20% have an ambulatory disability, while 12% have a hearing disability, 7% have a cognitive disability, and 6% have a disability that makes independent living difficult or impossible. Other disabilities include self-care (7%) and vision (5%).

- Housing and households -- Half of seniors (50%) live in a household with at least one spouse or family member, while nearly half (48%) live in a one-person household. More seniors live in owner-occupied housing than the general population (78% and 67%, respectively). Nearly 22% of seniors rent.

Figure 3: Senior Demographic Profile, 2017-2021
Source: 2017-2021 ACS, 5-year average.

2017-2021 5-Year Averages	Age 65+
TOTAL POPULATION	97,087
SEX AND AGE	
Male	44.0%
Female	56.0%
Median age (years)	72.8
RACE AND HISPANIC OR LATINO ORIGIN	
One race	98.8%
White	86.3%
Black or African American	10.6%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.1%
Asian	1.5%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	
Some other race	0.2%
Two or more races	1.2%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	0.8%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	85.9%
HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE	
Households	62,739
Family households	50.0%
Married-couple family	39.8%
Female householder, no spouse present, family	7.9%
Nonfamily households	50.0%
Householder living alone	47.5%
MARITAL STATUS	
Population 15 years and over	97,087
Now married, except separated	53.0%
Widowed	23.1%
Divorced	15.8%
Separated	1.0%
Never married	7.1%
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	
Population 25 years and over	97,087
Less than high school graduate	9.7%
High school graduate, GED, or alternative	36.4%
Some college or associate's degree	25.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher	28.0%
RESPONSIBILITY FOR GRANDCHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS	
Population 30 years and over	97,087
Living with grandchild(ren)	3.5%
Responsible for grandchild(ren)	0.8%
VETERAN STATUS	
Civilian population 18 years and over	97,087
Civilian veteran	15.4%
DISABILITY STATUS	
Civilian noninstitutionalized population	94,692
With any disability	31.6%
No disability	68.4%
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	
Civilian population 16 years and over	97,087
In labor force	18.4%
Employed	17.7%
Unemployed	0.8%
Percent of civilian labor force	4.1%
Not in labor force	81.6%
INCOME	
Households	62,739
With earnings	35.9%
Mean earnings (dollars)	$55,393
With Social Security income	87.6%
Mean Social Security income (dollars)	$22,349
With Supplemental Security Income	5.2%
Mean Supplemental Security Income (dollars)	$10,693
With cash public assistance income	3.5%
Mean cash public assistance income (dollars)	$2,476
With retirement income	63.2%
Mean retirement income (dollars)	$28,767
With Food Stamp/SNAP benefits	9.4%
POVERTY STATUS	
Population for whom poverty status is determined	94,692
Below 100 percent of the poverty level	7.8%
100 to 149 percent of the poverty level	8.5%
At or above 150 percent of the poverty level	83.7%
Occupied housing units	62,739
HOUSING TENURE	
Owner-occupied housing units	78.2%
Renter-occupied housing units	21.8%
Owner-occupied housing units	49,043
MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A % OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
Less than 30 percent	75.5%
30 percent or more	24.5%
Renter-occupied housing units	13,696
GROSS RENT AS A % OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
Less than 30 percent	47.2%
30 percent or more	52.8%
GROSS RENT	
Median gross rent (dollars)	$801

Senior Demographic Profile (continued)

Other important demographic characteristics of seniors in Summit County include:

- Income and poverty -- Nearly 9% of seniors live below the poverty line in Summit County; about 8,800 in all; lower than the rate for the county as a whole (12%). Most of the difference in poverty rates can be explained by the impact of social safety net programs like Social Security, Medicare, and others that benefit seniors. In fact, a November 2018 study by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities entitled "Social Security Lifts More Americans Above Poverty Than Any Other Program" estimates that the nationwide 2021 poverty rate for seniors would have risen from 10% to over 38% in the absence of Social Security benefits.[1]

  Sources of income for seniors: The vast majority of seniors in Summit County receive Social Security income (88%), while 63% receive other forms of retirement income. Social Security benefits averaged $22,349 per year, while other retirement sources averaged $28,767. Nearly 36% of seniors receive earned income, while 9% received benefits from the SNAP program. Five percent received Supplemental Security Income (SSI), while 4% got cash assistance.

- Employment -- Nearly 9% of Summit County seniors worked full-time in the past 12 months, while 13% worked part-time. The vast majority, 82%, did not work at all.

Notes:

1 Romig, K. (2018). Social Security Lifts More Americans Above Poverty Than Any Other Program. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. Retrieved January 10, 2019, from https://www.cbpp.org/research/social-security/social-security-lifts-more-americans-above-poverty-than-any-other-program.

Younger seniors (ages 65-69) worked the most, with 19% working full-time and another 19% working part-time. Only 4% of those age 70 and older worked full-time while 9% worked part-time (Figure 4b).

- Household Income -- The median household income for all seniors is nearly $46,933 per year; lower than the $63,111 for all households.

- Mortgage burden -- In the years just before retirement (ages 60-64), 59% of owner-occupied homes are mortgaged. That percentage drops to 51% of occupied homes with a mortgage between ages 65 and 74,
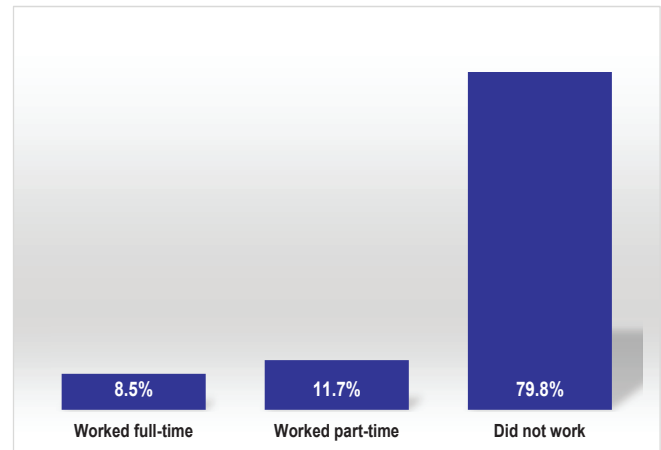
Figure 4a: Senior Employment Status, 2017-2021.
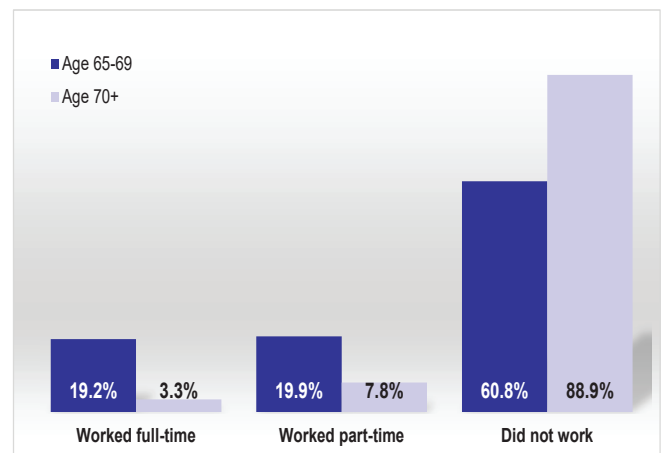*Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey, 5-year average.*

Worked full-time: 8.5% | Worked part-time: 11.7% | Did not work: 79.8%

Figure 4b: Senior Employment Status by Age Group, 2017-2021.
Source: 2017-2021 ACS, 5-year average.

Age 65-69 / Age 70+ — Worked full-time: 19.2% / 3.3% | Worked part-time: 19.9% / 7.8% | Did not work: 60.8% / 88.9%

and again to 29% for those age 75 or older. According to the ACS, the median monthly cost for senior homeowners with a mortgage is $1,161. Median monthly owner costs for seniors without a mortgage is $511. Even without a mortgage, homeowner costs for seniors add up to more than $6,100 annually. One-quarter of seniors who own their homes (24%) pay at least 30% of their income for mortgages and other housing costs.

- Renter burden -- Seniors who rent face an even greater housing cost burden. More than 53% of seniors who rent spend at least 30% of their income on rent; much higher than the rate for all Summit County residents (43%).

- A large part of the difference in the renter burden for seniors can be partially explained by their change in income. The median household income for those age 45-64 was $76,501 in 2021; the highest of any age group. As noted earlier, the median household income for those 65 and older was just below

$46,933. That's a 39% decline in median income when moving into retirement years; nearly $30,000 annually.

- Unfortunately, monthly rental costs for seniors don't drop anything like enough to keep pace with their income loss. According to ACS data for 2017-2021, median gross rent for all Summit County residents is $882 vs. $801 for those age 65 and older. That's a decline of only 9% as people move into their retirement years.
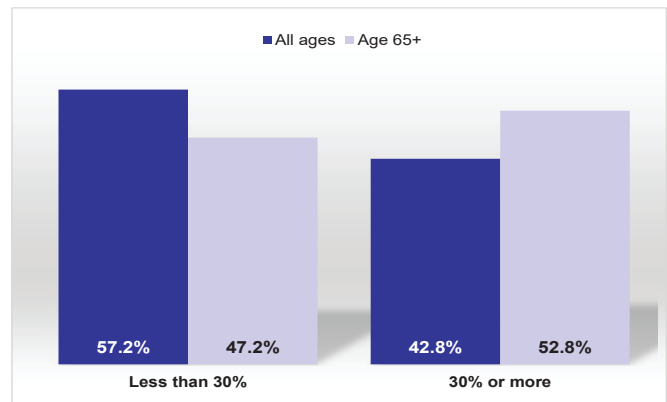

Figure 6: Percent of Renters Paying 30% or More of Income for Rent, 2017-2021. *Source: 2017-2021 ACS, 5-year average.*
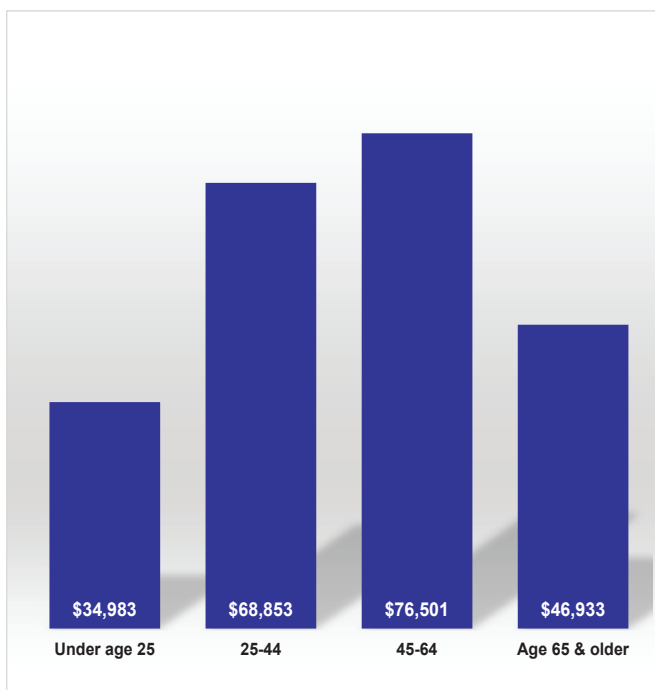

Figure 5a: Median Household Income By Age, Summit County 2017-2021 *Source: 2017-2021 ACS, 5-year average*
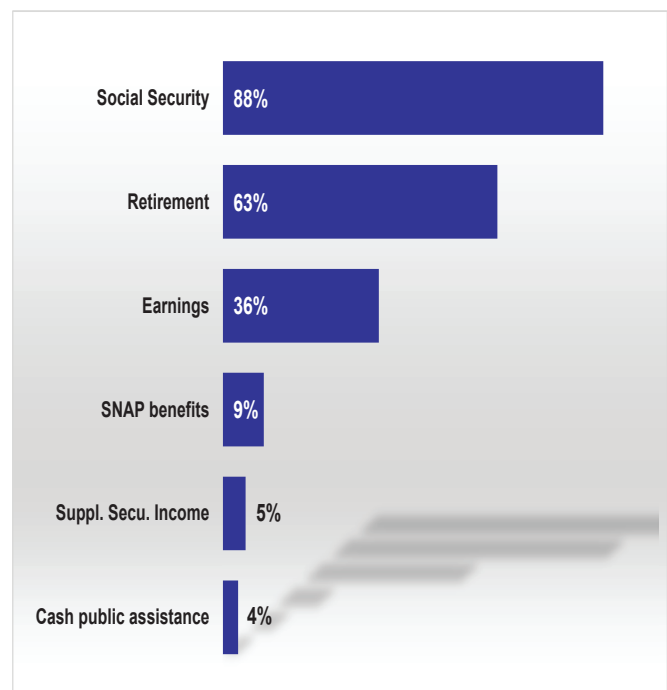

Figure 5b: Household Income Sources for Seniors, Summit County 2017-2021 *Source: 2017-2021 ACS, 5-year average*

- Grandparents raising grandchildren -- One of the more important social indicators the ACS tracks is grandparents raising their own grandchildren. Here in Summit County, an estimated 8,714 grandparents live in the same household as their grandchildren. Of that total, 3,031 grandparents were responsible for raising those grandchildren. Because unintended pregnancies can happen at very early ages (making people parents and sometimes grandparents early in life), the ACS category for grandparents begins at age 30. Of the 3,031 grandparents raising their grandchildren, just under 47% (1,423) are over age 60.

Among grandparents over age 60 who were raising their own grandchildren, 54% were doing so without the help of the children's parents. The burden of being responsible for raising a child not only puts physical and emotional stress on those seniors who are raising their grandchildren, but significant financial burdens as well. According to the ACS, the median household income of those doing so without the help of the children's parents is much lower than for grandparents who are getting that help (see Figure 7).

The amount of time grandparents must commit to raising their own grandchildren can also significantly increase the stress seniors raising their own grandchildren face. According to ACS data, 41% have been responsible for raising their grandchildren for at least 5 years. A much smaller percentage (12%) have been responsible for 6 months or less.
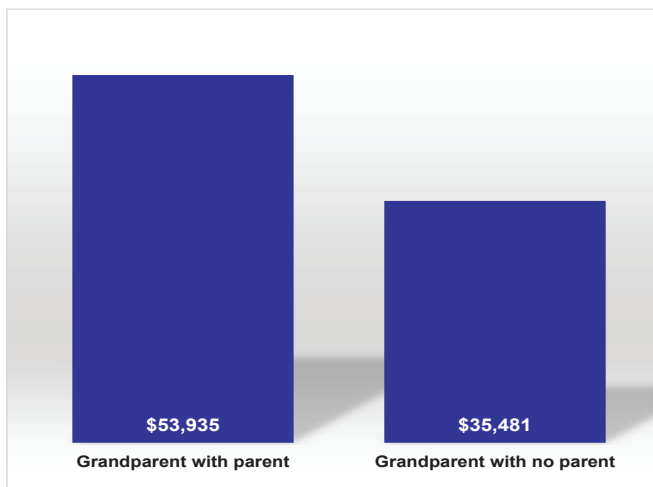

Figure 7: Median Household Income of Grandparents Raising Their Own Grandchildren, 2017-2021;
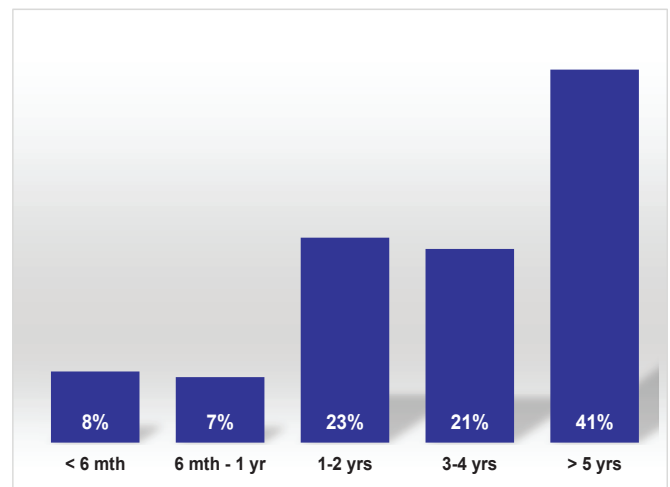*Source: 2017-2021 ACS, 5-year average*

Figure 8: Length of Time That Grandparents Raising Their Own Grandchildren Are Responsible For Them, 2017-2021;
Source: 2017-2021 ACS, 5-year average

Health Issues Among Seniors

Fall-related injuries -- Between 2014 and 2020, Summit County seniors had over 42,000 emergency room (ER) visits for a fall-related injury; about an average of 6,100 per year (see Figure 9). Fall-related ER visits rose from just under 52 per 1,000 seniors in 2014 to 82 per 1,000 in 2019, before dropping to just 42.0 in 2020 (3,800 fewer ER visits).

Of those 42,000 visits, records for 2,800 visits included specific mentions of a head injury associated with the ER visit (which could either be a cause or consequence of the fall). Sixty-six of the records included specific mentions of traumatic brain injury (again, as either a cause of consequence of the fall). A total of 6,303 de-
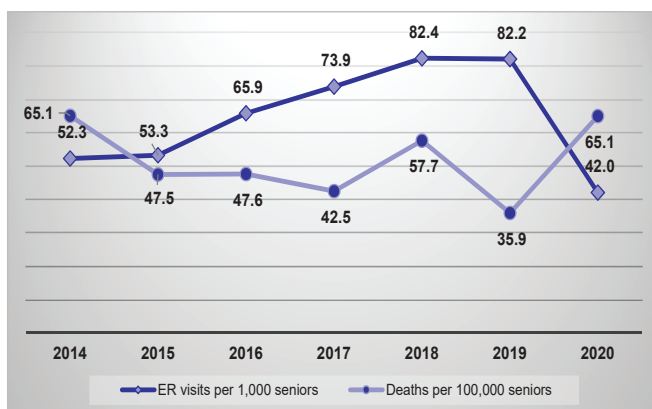

Figure 9: **Fall-Related Emergency Room Visits and Fatalities, 2014-2020**; *Sources: EpiCenter, Ohio Department of Health (ODH) death records*

identified individuals, about 15% of the total, visited an ER more than once for a fall-related injury. Eleven of those de-identified individuals visited an ER between 10 and 19 times for a fall-related reason. In addition to falls, other frequently-occurring reasons include lacerations (2%), ankle injuries (1%), and loss of consciousness (2.9%).

Fall-related deaths -- Between 2014 and 2020, 339 Summit County seniors suffered a fall-related death. While fall-related injuries rose steadily from 2015 to 2019, fall-related deaths moved in the

opposite direction until 2019. Fall-related deaths dropped from 65 per 100,000 in 2014 (57 deaths) to 36 in 2019 (35 deaths); a 45% decline.

That pattern changed from 2019 to 2020, with fall-related death rates rising to 65 per 1,000 (65 deaths); an 81% increase in one year.

There are two likely explanations for the sharp decline in fall-related ER visits and the sharp growth in fall-related deaths among seniors appears to be related to the lockdowns necessitated by COVID-19 last year. First, it is possible that many seniors were afraid of going to an ER after a fall for fear of being exposed to COVID-19, significantly increasing their danger of dying from fall-related injuries. Second, the need for vulnerable seniors to avoid exposure to COVID-19 reduced opportunities for healthy physical activity. Normal activities such as shopping, walking, or participating in exercise classes were all negatively impacted by last year's movement restrictions.

Of the 339 deaths between 2014 and 2020, 252 were described in death certificates as either *Other fall on same level* or *Unspecified fall*. Frequently-mentioned specific causes included *Fall from stairs* (39 cases) and *Fall from bed* (23 cases). Other causes include *Fall from chair*, *ladder or wheelchair* (14 cases).

Age of fall-related incidents -- The average age of fall-related ER visits was 80.5 since 2014, while the average age of fall related deaths was 87.5.

Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia -- Between 2016 and 2020, there were 3,129 Summit County residents who died of either Alzheimer's Disease or dementia. The causes of death were evenly split between Alzheimer's Disease and dementia (51% and 49%, respectively). The vast majority of cases, 68%, occurred in the 85 and older population

(Figure 10). The youngest victim of either disease was 48, while the oldest was 107.

Figure 11 shows the age-adjusted death rates for Alzheimer's disease and unspecified dementia deaths. The rate has been steadily climbing along with the size of the senior population since 2007. Death rates for Alzheimer's / dementia grew by about 11% between the 2010-2013 and 2018-2021 time periods.

For a more detailed look at Alzheimer's Disease and dementia, please see our data brief entitled "Alzheimer's Disease in Summit County," which can be downloaded at https://www.scph.org/assessments-reports.
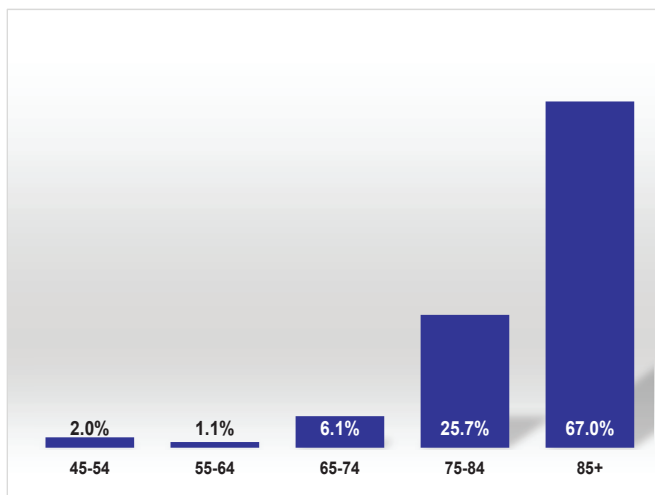

Figure 10: **Alzheimer's and Unspecified Dementia Deaths by Age Group, 2017-2021**; *Source: ODH death records*
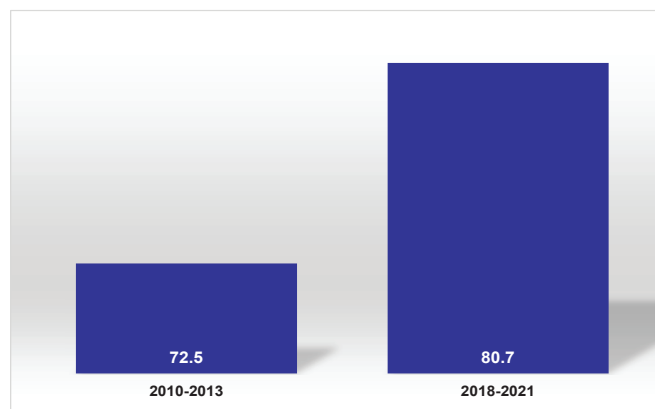

Figure 11: **Age-Adjusted Death Rates for Alzheimer's and Unspecified Dementia Deaths - 2010-2021**; *Source: ODH death records*

Top 10 Leading Causes of Death (non-COVID-19)

The table on the next page is based on a format originally designed by the CDC. It shows the top 10 leading causes of death for each of nine age groups in Summit County over age 60. Some of the more common causes of death are color-coded so that readers can follow the progression of that disease throughout the age spectrum.

At younger ages (ages 60-79), cancer, heart disease, and chronic lower respiratory diseases consistently rank as the top three ranked causes (in that order). From age 80 onward, heart disease becomes the number one ranked cause, with Alzheimer's disease / other related dementia rising from the fourth-highest cause (80-84) to the second-highest cause (age 90+). Cancer as a cause of death shows a relative decline during the later years, though it remains a top four cause of death in the 90+ population.

Figure 12 - Top 10 Leading Causes of Death in Summit County, 2007-2021, Age 60+

Rank	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	90-94	95-99	100+
1	Cancer	Cancer	Cancer	Cancer	Heart disease	Heart disease	Heart disease	Heart disease	Heart disease
2	Heart disease	Heart disease	Heart disease	Heart disease	Cancer	Cancer	Alzheimer's disease	Alzheimer's disease	Alzheimer's disease
3	Chronic lower respiratory	Chronic lower respiratory	Chronic lower respiratory	Chronic lower respiratory	Chronic lower respiratory	Alzheimer's disease	Cancer	Stroke	Essential hypertension / hypertensive renal disease
4	Accidents	Diabetes	Diabetes	Stroke	Alzheimer's disease	Stroke	Stroke	Cancer	Cancer
5	Diabetes	Stroke	Stroke	Diabetes	Stroke	Chronic lower respiratory	Accidents	Accidents	Kidney disease
6	Stroke	Chronic liver disease	Chronic liver disease	Accidents	Diabetes	Diabetes	Chronic lower respiratory	Chronic lower respiratory	Stroke
7	Chronic liver disease	Accidents	Accidents	Kidney disease	Influenza and pneumonia	Accidents	Essential hypertension / hypertensive renal disease	Nutritional deficiencies	Accidents
8	Kidney disease	Kidney disease	Kidney disease	Septicemia	Accidents	Essential hypertension / hypertensive renal disease	Kidney disease	Essential hypertension / hypertensive renal disease	Nutritional deficiencies
9	Septicemia	Essential hypertension / hypertensive renal disease	Septicemia	Alzheimer's disease	Kidney disease	Parkinson's disease	Diabetes	Kidney disease	Diabetes
10	Influenza and pneumonia	Septicemia	Influenza and pneumonia	Influenza and pneumonia	Parkinson's disease	Kidney disease	Influenza and pneumonia	Diabetes	Chronic lower respiratory