

## *Women and Healthy Aging*

As a whole, Los Angeles County residents are living longer, with women living an average of 5 years longer than men. (1) In 2010, over 600,000 women were estimated to be over the age of 65. By 2030, that number is expected to double, and with that, the issues related to aging. (2)

### **Fast Facts for LA County Women age 65 and older:**

- Nearly 250,000 women (43%) reported a household income of less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Among Latinas 65+, more than 100,000 (67%) have incomes below 200% of the FPL. (2)
- Nearly 25% of women living below 200% of the FPL were not food secure in 2007.(3)
- About 59% of women have been diagnosed with arthritis with an ethnicity breakdown of 72% of black women, 63% of Latinas, 58% of white women, and 44% of Asian/Pacific Islander women. (3)
- The percentage of women with depression is nearly double that of men in the same age group. (2)

### **Chronic Conditions**

Women's increased longevity can result in more years lived in poor health or with lower quality of life. According to the 2007 Los Angeles County Health Survey, the percentage of women with chronic conditions increases dramatically with age. Survey participants were asked if they had ever been told by a doctor or health care professional that they have any of the following 5 chronic conditions: depression, diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. (4)

While 64% of respondents under 50 reported not having any of these conditions, 83% of respondents over the age of 65 reported being diagnosed with one or more of these conditions. Ethnic disparities are evident, with 93% of African American women, 85% of Latinas, 82% of white women and 80% of Asian/Pacific Islander women reporting being diagnosed with one or more of these conditions. (1)

However, these chronic conditions are not inevitable as women age - they are largely preventable by smoking cessation, improved diet, and an increase in physical activity. Even when a woman has been diagnosed with a chronic condition, these three activities can help to mitigate some of the more severe effects of these conditions.

### **Prevention Strategies**

Key measures include practicing a healthy lifestyle and the use of early detection practices (e.g., screening for breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers, diabetes and its complications, and depression).

Adult immunizations can prevent some of the 42,000 deaths from influenza and pneumonia each year. Ninety percent of flu-related deaths and more than half of flu-related hospitalizations occur in people age 65 and older. This season, people 65 and older will have two flu shots available to choose from – a regular dose flu vaccine, and a new flu vaccine designed specifically for people 65+ with a higher dose that should result in a stronger immune response. (5)

Injury prevention strategies can help older adults avoid injuries from falls, the leading cause of injury death among older adults and a major contributor to hospitalizations and emergency room visits for this population.

Additionally, staying mentally and physically active and maintaining a positive attitude all have a powerful effect on aging. Aging is not a choice but healthy aging is!

*Be Active, Eat Smart, Don't Smoke, Get Checked!*  
**Prevention Matters!**

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#### References

1. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, LA HEALTH: *Healthy Women: Wellness Across the Life Span*, October 2010.
2. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. *Healthy Aging: A Guide to Important Health Topics Among Older Women in Los Angeles County*, 2010.
3. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Office of Women's Health. *Health Indicators for Women in Los Angeles County: Highlighting Disparities by Ethnicity and Poverty Level*, February 2010.
4. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2007 *LA County Health Survey*. Accessed November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010.
5. <http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/seniors/index.html>