

## Substance Abuse Treatment Need Among Older Adults in 2020: The Impact of the Aging Baby-Boom Cohort

Gfroerer, J., **Penne, M.A., Pemberton, M., and Folsom, R.** (2003). Substance abuse treatment need among older adults in 2020: The impact of the aging baby-boom cohort. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 69 (2):127–135.

Birth cohorts that experience high rates of illicit drug use in youth have subsequently shown higher rates of use and associated problems as they age, relative to other cohorts. Rates of illicit drug use peaked in the late 1970s when the baby-boom cohort, those born between 1946 and 1964, were between the ages of 15 and 33. Rates of heavy alcohol use have also been shown to be higher among baby boomers than in earlier cohorts. In addition to being more likely to be illicit drug and heavy alcohol users, the baby-boom cohort is also larger than earlier cohorts.



Michael A. Penne



Ralph E. Folsom

This study utilized regression analysis on 2 years' worth of cross-sectional data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) in order to estimate the number of older adults (50 and older) who will need substance abuse treatment in 2020. In 2020, the 50-and-older age group will include all of the surviving baby boomers as well as a post-baby-boom cohort (born 1965–70) that also experienced a high rate of illicit drug use during youth.

The number of older adults in need of substance abuse treatment is estimated to increase from 1.7 million in 2000 and 2001 to 4.4 million in 2020. This is due to a 50% increase in the number of older adults and a 70% increase in the rate of treatment need among older adults. The aging baby boom cohort will place increasing demands on the substance abuse treatment system in the next two decades, requiring a shift in focus to address the special needs of an older population of substance abusers. There is also a need to develop better tools for measuring substance use and abuse among older adults.

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