HEALTH STATUS - Life Expectancy

Higher Life Expectancy: Overall, life expectancy at birth in Hawai‘i is among the longest in the nation. In 2000, the most recent year for which state estimates are available, people born in Hawai‘i had a life expectancy of 80 years, three years longer than the U.S. average. When Hawai‘i’s life expectancy for 2000 is compared to that of the rest of the world, Hawai‘i is fifth, behind Andorra, San Marino, Japan, and Singapore.

Improvement Over Time: Life expectancy in Hawai‘i has improved dramatically since 1910 when it was less than 44 years. It was not until 1950 that life expectancy in Hawai‘i surpassed that of the United States. It has continued to exceed the U.S. life expectancy ever since. Gains in life expectancy every 10 years mirror major developments in public health and medicine. The largest gains in Hawai‘i were seen between 1920 and 1930 (8.3 years increase in life expectancy), 1930 and 1940 (+8 years) and 1940 and 1950 (+7.5 years). These are attributed to reductions in infant and maternal mortality and the introduction of antibiotics. Since statehood, the largest life expectancy increase, of almost four years, occurred between 1970 and 1980. More recently, life expectancy has increased about one year every decade.

Women Live Longer Than Men: Reflecting similar patterns throughout industrialized countries, including the United States, women live longer than men. Women in Hawai‘i have an almost six-year longer life expectancy at birth than men. From 1950 to 2000, life expectancy for men increased 9 years, for women 11 years. From 1980, life expectancy for men increased 2 years, for women, only 1 year.

County Differences: In 2000, life expectancy in Honolulu, Maui, and Kaua‘i Counties was nearly 80 years, while in Hawai‘i County it was approximately 78 years. (It should be noted however, that the life expectancy for the Big Island is still longer than that for the nation as a whole.) The longest life expectancy for males was 77.2 years in Honolulu, and female life expectancy was longest on Kaua‘i at 83.2 years. The greatest difference between male and female life expectancy was on Kaua‘i, where females were expected to live 7.4 years longer than men. The least difference was in Honolulu, with females projected to live 5.4 years longer than men.

Ethnic Differences: The Chinese in Hawai‘i have the nation’s longest average life span at 83 years. However, not all groups share this longevity: Hawaiian/part-Hawaiian men, for example, have a life expectancy of 71 years. Since the 1940s, Chinese and Japanese have had longer life expectancies than Caucasians and Hawaiians/part-Hawaiians. With the exception of life expectancy calculations for 1920, Hawaiians/part-Hawaiians have had the shortest life expectancy of all major groups since 1910. Differences between the longest life expectancy and the shortest are substantial. In 1910, life expectancy for Hawaiians/part-Hawaiians was 22 years shorter than for Caucasians, the group with the longest life expectancy. By 1990, life expectancy was 9 years shorter than for the Chinese. During this time span, the predominant causes of death shifted from infectious diseases to chronic diseases, to be discussed later.
1. San Marino is the third smallest state in Europe (after the Vatican and Monaco), and claims to be the world's oldest republic.
