

PRESS RELEASE

Baby Boomers: Not As Healthy as Previously Believed

Lower smoking rates offset by increased obesity

New York, New York, March 5, 2015—We hear all the time that “50 is the new 40” or “60 is the new 40”—claims that make it sound as though today’s baby boomers are healthier than their counterparts in other generations. But are they? A new study published in the March 2015 issue of *The Milbank Quarterly* suggests that baby boomers are not likely to be healthier than other generations.

The impetus for the study was the tension between popular notions and scientific research regarding the health of aging baby boomers. To date, there is little scientific evidence addressing how the health of baby boomers compares with that of earlier generations. The paper, “Benefits Gained, Benefits Lost: Comparing Baby Boomers to Other Generations in a Longitudinal Cohort Study of Self-Rated Health,” was written by Elizabeth M. Badley, professor at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto, and colleagues.

Using self-rated health as an indicator of health status, the researchers analyzed the Canadian Longitudinal National Population Health Survey and examined the effects of increased education, higher income, and lower smoking rates across four generations: World War II (born between 1935 and 1944), older baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1954), younger baby boomers (born between 1955 and 1964), and Generation X (born between 1965 and 1974).

Some of the findings:

- The effects of increased education, higher income, and lower smoking rates on improving self-rated health were nearly counter-balanced by the adverse effect of increasing body mass index (BMI)
- Assumptions that baby boomers will require less health care as they age because of better education, more prosperity, and less propensity to smoke may not be realized because of increases in obesity

“Our findings point to a missed opportunity and the need to redouble our efforts to control the obesity epidemic so that we can fully benefit from the improvements in education, income, and less smoking,” says Badley.

The findings have implications for health policy and planning. Because of the greater number of older people in the population, it is expected that more people will require health and social services. How will this need impact the health system? “... An important question for health policy and planning is whether this impact might be larger or smaller because baby boomers’

characteristics and health behaviors are different from those of their older and younger counterparts,” write the researchers.

About *The Milbank Quarterly*

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