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## Brief reports

**Hearing ability affects walking ability.** A group of 434 women ages 63-76 had their hearing, walking speed and walking endurance measured. The 179 women who had impaired hearing walked more slowly and for shorter distances than women with normal hearing, and reported more difficulties walking. After three years, women with impaired hearing had twice the risk of new walking difficulties compared to women with normal hearing.

SOURCE: Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, 57(12):2282-2286 (December 2009)

**Geography does not mean opportunity for successful aging.** In six countries in the Caribbean, people ages 60-79 years shared their perspectives on their access to services and support during 31 focus groups. There were “large disparities” between the responses of people in the different countries, and they reported “unequal opportunities to obtain health care and social services, public transport, income and food by both socio-economic status and location.”

SOURCE: Ageing and Society, 30:79-101 (January 2010)

**Consumers want health-promoting businesses.** In a telephone survey of 1,000 adults, 80% said it was important for business to share knowledge and innovations that improve health, and 70% believed business should invest in creating healthy communities. Only about one in 10 felt businesses are doing an excellent or very good job of meeting those expectations. The majority (80%) said they were likely to purchase from, recommend, trust or work for a company that is committed to engaging in and improving health, and more than 70% are likely to invest in it.

SOURCE: Edelman Public Relations (December 16, 2009)

**Older men more sexually active.** Results from the National Social Life, Health and Aging project based in 3,000 interviews with a nationally representative sample of adults ages 57-85 years are reported in a special supplement. At all ages in the study, men were more likely than women to have a partner, more likely to be sexually active with that partner, and tended to have more positive and permissive attitudes toward sex. SOURCE: Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences, 64B, Supplement 1 (November 2009)

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## Research reports:

### Target skills that help elders perform difficult activities

There are many wellness opportunities that can be offered to older adults. In a person-centered environment, providing activities that meet the interests and needs of individuals is paramount. A research group wanted to look beyond the typical measures of disability (basic activities of daily living [BADLs] and independent activities of daily living [IADLs]) to explore how performance in other types of activities could correlate with lifestyle-related function.

**STUDY:** A group of 375 people ages 70 or older who were higher functioning but at risk for a transition to disability or recovering from a disability sorted cards showing photographs of older adults performing 39 activities (no BADLs or IADLs were included). Participants divided the cards into separate categories: “never performed,” “used to but no longer perform,” “currently perform, hard to do” and “currently perform, easy to do.”

**FINDINGS:** The group said it was easy to perform about 60% of the activities they had “ever performed.” People who had a BADL or IADL disability said they could easily perform 32% of the activities. On average, respondents reported that 18 of the activities were easy to perform (e.g., watch TV, take out trash), two were hard to perform (e.g., walk for enjoyment or exercise), 11 were no longer performed (e.g., studying, dancing) and eight were never performed (e.g., playing musical instrument, using computer).

**COMMENT:** To apply these results to developing programs, “I would concentrate on the activities people say they do but with difficulty,” corresponding author Steven M. Albert, PhD, advised ICAA Research Review. “For diversity of activity programming, I would focus on ‘lost’ activities, since these are activities that have dropped out of someone’s former repertoire of activity. These data also suggest it would be valuable to take an inventory of activity and personalize activity programming, which I am sure most therapists and program directors already know!”

**SOURCE:** The Gerontologist, 49(6):767-777 (December 2009)

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### **Modest revenue growth for retirement communities**

The US government classifies businesses using the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). The health care sector is NAICS 62, defined as establishments providing health care and social assistance that are delivered by trained practitioners. Within NAICS 62 are physicians, social workers and hospitals as well as nursing homes and residential homes for older adults, community centers and social services for children and families.

**SURVEY:** The economic estimates are based on data from the 2008 Service Annual Survey, and include only employer organizations.

**COMMUNITY CARE FACILITIES:** Within the category of community care facilities (NAICS 6233), including continuing care retirement communities and “homes for the elderly,” there was a modest growth in revenues in 2008 to US \$35.5 billion, an increase of 3.3% from 2007. Note that this category does not include assisted living facilities or nursing homes.

Continuing care retirement communities (NAICS 623311), establishments primarily engaged in providing a range of residential and personal care services for the elderly and other persons who are unable, or do not desire, to fully care for themselves and have on-site nursing care facilities, increased revenue 3.1% in 2008 to US \$20.5 billion, compared with a 9.8% increase in 2007.

The homes for the elderly category (NAICS 623312), which is defined as providing residential and personal care services without on-site nursing care, grew 3.5% in 2008 to US \$14.9 billion.

**COMMENT:** “In spite of only small increases in some industries over the past year, the health care sector continues to represent a sizable portion of our economy,” said Mark Wallace, chief of the Census Bureau’s Service Sector Statistics Division. “At \$1.75 trillion, this sector made up 30% of the service sector in 2008, which itself represented about 55% of the economic activity in the United States.”

**SOURCE:** US Census Bureau (December 17, 2009)

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### **Disability rates among older adults rise again**

Recent research studies have estimated the prevalence of disability among older adults in the United States. While the numbers don't match—likely due to the use of different definitions of “disability” and population samples—the take-home message is that rates of disability are on the rise among older adults.

In the last issue of ICAA Research Review (9[45] 2009), data from the National Health Interview Survey 2008 showed that people ages 75 years and older were about three times more likely than persons ages 65-74 years to report limitations in basic or instrumental activities of daily living. A separate analysis from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (1988-94 and 1999-2004) found a significant increase in rates of disability among 60-69 year-olds, but not among people ages 70 and older (ICAA Research Review, 9[41] 2009).

### **Now, a new analysis looks at people 65 years and older.**

**STUDY:** Data from the American Community Survey and National Nursing Home Survey for people ages 65 and older was divided according to whether the person lived in the community or lived in an institution, such as a nursing home. Disability was defined as difficulty in basic activities of daily living, including dressing, bathing and in-home mobility due to a physical, mental or emotional condition lasting six months or more.

**FINDINGS:** Disability rates among community-dwelling people increased 9% between 2000 and 2005. When people living in an institution were included, the number of women with disability increased, but the number of men remained about the same.

**COMMENT:** “The combination of increasing disability rates plus a growing population of older adults emphasizes the importance of prevention of the many chronic conditions giving rise to disability in the first place,” said lead author Esme Fuller-Thomson, PhD. “There is evidence, for example, that the doubling of obesity rates over the last three decades may be linked to rising disability in older people, yet the obesity problem is largely preventable.”

**SOURCE:** The Journals of Gerontology Series A: Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences, 64A(12):1333-1336 (December 2009)

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### **Caregivers of people over 50 are older, too**

Women remain the primary caregivers of adults and children with special needs, according to the “Caregiving in the US” survey, which estimates that 29% of the US adult population, or 65.7 million people, are caregivers.

**SURVEY:** Caregivers are defined as those who provide unpaid care to an adult or a child. The larger survey is based primarily on quantitative telephone screenings of 6,806 adults and interviews with 1,480 caregivers ages 18 or older. A special report includes 1,397 people ages 18 years and older who care for a person over 50 years old.

**FINDINGS:** Among people who care for a person 50 years or older, 67% are women, 40% are ages 50-64 years and 27% are ages 35-49 years. Over half (59%) are married and half (50%) work full-time. Caregivers most frequently assist a relative (89%), most often their mother (36%), who is an average age of 77 years. On average, they provide 19 hours of care each week and give care for four years.

The main reasons people need care are old age (15%) or Alzheimer's disease, confusion, dementia or forgetfulness (15%), Caregivers said they need help or information on keeping their recipient safe at home, finding easy activities to do and choosing a home care agency, assisted living facility or nursing home.

**COMMENT:** “More and more people who are 65-plus are providing care to both children and adults,” said Gail Hunt, president and CEO of the National Alliance for Caregiving. “The shift to an older population of caregivers points to a real need for assistance for these individuals from family, friends, employers and social service programs. With more support for caregiving, older and disabled people would be able to do what is so important to them, to remain in their own homes with those they love.”

**SOURCE:** National Alliance for Caregiving (December 8, 2009)

### **Disclaimer**

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