

Region's populations aging faster than nation

Washington, Idaho see rise

BOISE — Both Idaho's and Washington's populations are aging faster than the nation's as a whole, according to the latest census figures, and that has implications for the economy and the labor market.

"It's going to have an impact on the need for services," said Janell Hyer, research analyst with the Idaho Department of Labor. "We're going to have a need for workers, bottom line."

In Idaho, the number of residents age 65 or older grew by 30 percent from 2010 to 2016, increasing from 12.5 percent of the population to 15.2 percent.

In Washington, the senior population grew 29.5 percent over the same period, rising from 12.3 percent to 14.8 percent of the population.

The aging trend in both states is similar to what's happening across the nation.

The number of Americans 65 and older rose 21.7 percent over that six-year period, rising from 13.1 percent of the total population to 15.2 percent.

Both states saw strong population growth over the six-year period, with all age groups showing increases. But seniors grew nearly twice as fast as other age groups in Idaho, where the 0-19 age group grew just 1 percent over that time.

In Washington, the 0-19 age group grew by just two-tenths of a percent over the six years.

Washington's median age rose slightly to 37.7 over the six years, while Idaho's rose to 36.2; both still were lower than the national average of 37.9. Idaho traditionally has had a lower median age and a higher population of young people due to large family sizes in some parts of the state.

Overall, Idaho's population grew 7.4 percent from 2010 to 2016, rising to nearly 1.7 million, compared to a national increase of 5.3 percent. Washington's grew 8.4 percent to nearly 7.3 million.

Hyer said the trend in Idaho was especially pronounced from 2015 to 2016. "In the last year, our population exploded — it grew a lot faster than it had in a long time," she said. "And most of it came in that higher age group," largely due to retirees moving to the state.

In that year alone, Idaho's population jumped by more than 30,000 residents, with 11,557 of them aged 65 or older.

"Right now, because the unemployment rate is so low, there is a need for skilled labor," Hyer said. "That's the challenge for Idaho right now, is to help build a labor force that meets the demands of the employers and meets the demands of the growing population."

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