

Shifting Sands: Demographics in King County

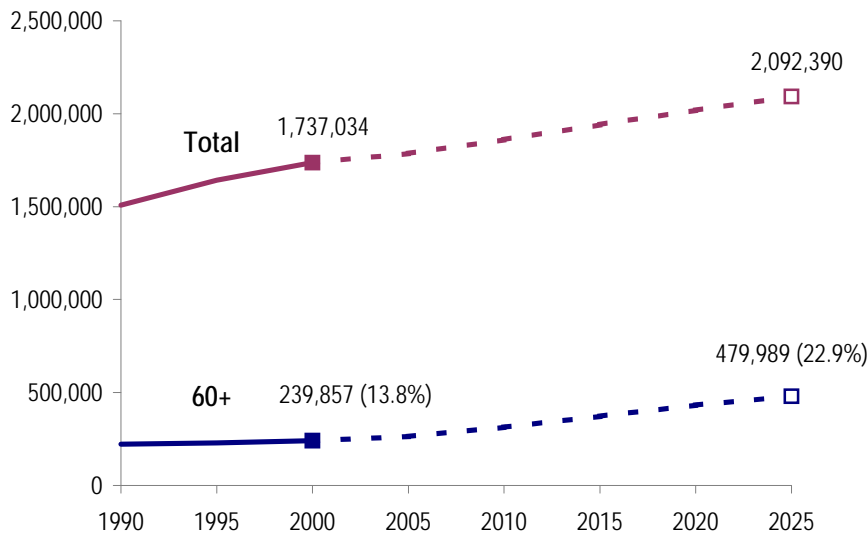
More Older Adults, More Diversity

Thanks to the remarkable improvements in education, medicine, nutrition, and general living standards of the last century, King County residents who reach the age of 60 can now expect to live almost 25 more years. The dramatic increase in life expectancy, from 47 years in 1900 to 79 years in 2000, is one of the main factors contributing to the increase in the number of older adults. As life expectancy rises, the number of “older old” and “oldest old” adults increases. For this reason, programs and policies directed to the 60 and over population must take into account the needs of up to three generations of older adults.

In addition to generational differences, the older population is extremely diverse in health, social, and economic status. While most older adults between the ages of 65 and 74 are active, healthy, and independent, those who are 85 years and older are more likely to face problems of ill health and loss of independence. Although the number of older adults is on the rise, disability rates are declining, an encouraging trend that policy makers are watching. On the other hand, health and income disparities across ethnic groups which are already pronounced will have a greater impact on quality of life in the future as a more diverse cohort of King County residents ages into the 60+ group.

King County Is Growing Older

Figure 1. King County Total and 60+ Populations, 1990-2025



Sources: Census 2000; WA Office of Financial Management

Between 2000 and 2010, King County's 60 and older population is expected to grow in absolute terms (from 239,857 to 313,456) and as a share of the total population (from 13.8% to 16.8%). This follows the relatively stable decade of 1990-2000, when this population increased modestly in number, but decreased in share. The increases expected this decade are a prelude to more dramatic increases in the decades to come, as the baby boomers begin to retire. It is estimated that by 2025, the 60+ cohort will represent almost a quarter of the County population. While the number of 60+ residents is expected to see the most dramatic increases after 2010, the number of 85+ residents is already climbing fast and will continue to do so for the remainder of this decade. It should then level off until around the year 2030, when the boomers reach this age.

Figure 2. King County 85+ Population, 1990-2025

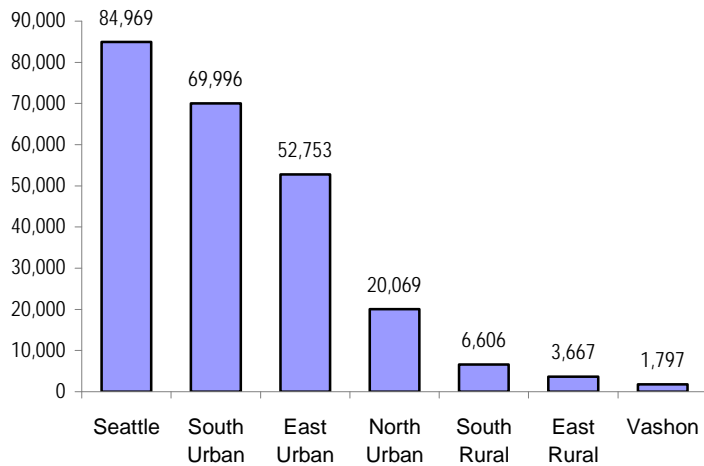


Sources: Census 2000; WA Office of Financial Management

Map 1 in Appendix A shows the total number of 60+ residents by census tract. Map 2 shows the changes in this population from 1990 to 2000. Note that Seattle's older population dropped significantly during this period, but this was more than offset by increases in the surrounding urban areas.

ADS follows King County when dividing the county into seven subregions for planning purposes – Figure 3 shows the breakdown of the 60+ population by subregion. Most older people live in the Seattle, South Urban and East Urban subregions, while Vashon has the smallest 60+ population.

Figure 3. 60+ Population by King County Subregion: Total 239,857



Source: Census 2000

The average King County resident born in 2000 can expect to live 79.2 years. There is wide disparity, however (Table 1 below) – Asians, who have the highest life expectancy, can expect to live over 10 more years than African Americans. At age 65 average life expectancy is 83.8 years – meaning the typical 65-year-old in King County can expect to live another 18.8 years. Compared with 1995 data, life expectancy at 65 rose for every group except African Americans and Native Americans, who saw decreases of 0.4 and 1.5 years, respectively.

Table 1. Life Expectancy by Race and Hispanic/Latino Ethnicity at Birth and Age 65 – King County

	At Birth	At Age 65
Asian & Pacific Islander	84.2	87.6
Hispanic Ethnicity*	83.6	87.0
White	79.3	83.7
African American	73.8	81.4
Native American	73.9	81.3

* overlaps with other categories

Source: 1991-2000 Population Estimates: EPE Unit, Public Health-Seattle & King County

The Older Population Is Becoming More Diverse

Gaps in life expectancy have remained fairly constant across racial groups in recent decades.¹ However, people of color will make up an increasing proportion of the older adult population as a more diverse cohort of Americans reaches retirement age. This trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future: In 1990, persons of color represented less than 10% of the County's 60+ population, but this increased to 15% in 2000, and is expected to reach 33% by 2050.²

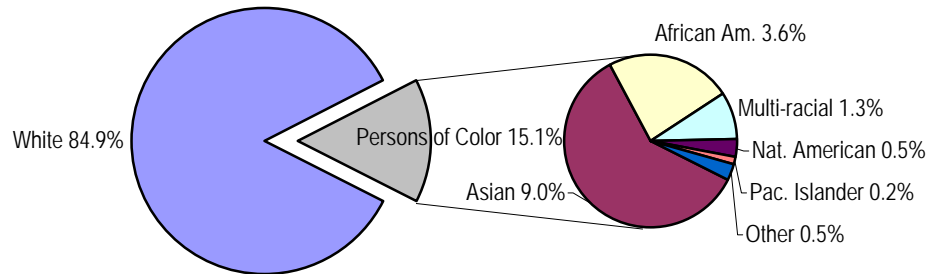
Table 2. Population Age 60+ by Race and Hispanic/Latino Ethnicity in King County

	#	%
White	203,594	84.9%
Asian	21,646	9.0%
African American	8,573	3.6%
Multi-racial	3,174	1.3%
Native American	1,301	0.5%
Other	1,151	0.5%
Pacific Islander	418	0.2%
Total	239,857	100.0%
Hispanic/Latino*	3,627	1.5%

* overlaps with other categories

Source: Census 2000

Figure 4. King County Population 60+ by Race



Source: Census 2000

As the data on life expectancy (Table 1 above) and disability (Table 6 below) illustrate, increasing numbers is not the only – or most important – story regarding older persons of color. Policymakers need to address persistent inequalities in health outcomes between racial and ethnic groups.

¹ Friedland, Robert B. and Laura Summer, *Demography Is Not Destiny*, National Academy on an Aging Society, January 1999.

² Friedland, Robert B. and Laura Summer, *Demography Is Not Destiny*, National Academy on an Aging Society, January 1999.

Washington state demographic data show that:

- About 27% of the 60+ population lives in King County
- Almost 45% older people of color reside in King County (see Map 3 in Appendix A).
- Washington is the fourth largest refugee resettlement state in the United States.
- Since 1996, 41% of refugee new arrivals resettled in King County.
- The majority of County refugees are from Southeast Asia (65%), followed by the former Soviet Union/Eastern Europe (21%), Africa (10%), and the Middle East (2.4%).³

Language can be a major barrier to services for these and other groups. According to the 2000 census, 5.3% of King County 65+ residents speak English either “not well” or “not at all.” As Table 3 shows, older Asians, Pacific Islanders and Hispanics/Latinos are most likely to have difficulties with English.

Table 3. Limited English Speaking 65+ by Race and Hispanic/Latino Ethnicity in King County

	Total 65+	Limited English[†]	% of Total
White	156,196	2,588	1.7%
Asian	15,460	6,288	40.7%
African American	6,163	122	2.0%
Multi-racial	2,147	361	16.8%
Native American	823	2	0.2%
Other	719	225	31.3%
Pacific Islander	264	84	31.8%
Total	181,772	13,533	7%
Hispanic/Latino*	2,350	469	20.0%

* overlaps with other categories

[†] Limited English = respondents who speak English “not well” or “not at all.”

Source: Census 2000

Poverty Rates Have Increased For Older People, Disparities Persist

Despite the County’s booming economy in the 90’s, poverty rates for older persons rose slightly. In 1990, 11,569 (6.9%) County residents 65+ were living below poverty; by 2000 this had risen to 12,937 (7.1%). With the collapse of the stock market bubble in 2001 and a continuing weak economy, it seems likely this trend has continued.

Map 4 in Appendix A shows the number of 65+ adults below poverty in each County census tract. Pockets of poverty can be found throughout the County. Map 5 shows the change in poverty levels from 1990 to 2000 – Kent and Auburn show particularly worrisome increases.

³ 2002 Refugee Service Delivery Plan for King County, King County Refugee Planning Committee, April 2002

In King County, older African Americans and persons of two or more races have the highest poverty rates, followed by Asians, those in the “other” census race category, and Hispanics/Latinos.

Table 4. People with Incomes Below Poverty by Race and Hispanic/Latino Ethnicity in King County

	Total 65+	65+ Below Poverty	% of Total
African American	6,163	1,089	17.7%
Asian	15,460	2,462	15.9%
White	156,196	8,808	5.6%
Native American	823	89	10.8%
Other	719	109	15.2%
Multi-racial	2,147	370	17.2%
Pacific Islander	264	10	3.8%
<i>Total</i>	<i>181,772</i>	<i>12,937</i>	<i>7.1%</i>
Hispanic/Latino*	2,350	339	14.4%

* overlaps with other categories

Source: Census 2000

In terms of ADS’ planning regions, the poverty rate among the 65+ population is highest in Seattle (9. 9%) and lowest on Vashon Island (2.3%).

Table 5. 65+ with Income Below Poverty by King County Subregion

	Total 65+	65+ Below Poverty	% of Total
East Rural	2,565	120	4.7%
East Urban	38,952	1,835	4.7%
North Urban	15,319	752	4.9%
Seattle	67,804	6,709	9.9%
South Rural	4,679	359	7.7%
South Urban	51,126	3,132	6.1%
Vashon	1,327	30	2.3%
<i>Total</i>	<i>181,772</i>	<i>12,937</i>	<i>7.1%</i>

Source: Census 2000

Older People Today Live Healthier Lives

The increasing number of older persons implies a greater need for services targeted to this population. However, this may be mitigated somewhat by the fact that older people are living healthier lives. Several recent studies have found decreasing rates of chronic disability among the older population⁴. A 1998 Rand study also found large declines in functional limitations (seeing, lifting and carrying, climbing, and walking) especially for those who were 80 years and older. In addition there were significant improvements in functioning for the 65 to 79 year old group.⁵

It is not clear which trend – rising numbers of older adults or lower rates of disability – will “swamp” the other in terms of the future need for services. This is a critical question for planners and service providers. Adding to the uncertainty, it is also not clear how long the trend toward lower disability rates will continue.

Data is lacking on whether disability decline is benefiting all racial/ethnic groups equally. It is clear, however, that significant disparities remain. In King County, older African Americans and older persons from two or more races have significantly higher rates of disability than other racial groups.

Table 6. Older People with Disabilities by Race and Hispanic/Latino Ethnicity in King County

	Total 65+	65+ With Disability	% With Disability
African American	6,163	3,183	51.6%
Asian	15,460	6,195	40.1%
White	156,196	58,227	37.3%
Native American	823	358	43.5%
Other	719	303	42.1%
Multi-racial	2,147	1,278	59.5%
Pacific Islander	264	103	39.0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>181,772</i>	<i>69,647</i>	<i>38.3%</i>
Hispanic/Latino*	2,350	1,011	43.0%

* overlaps with other categories

Source: Census 2000

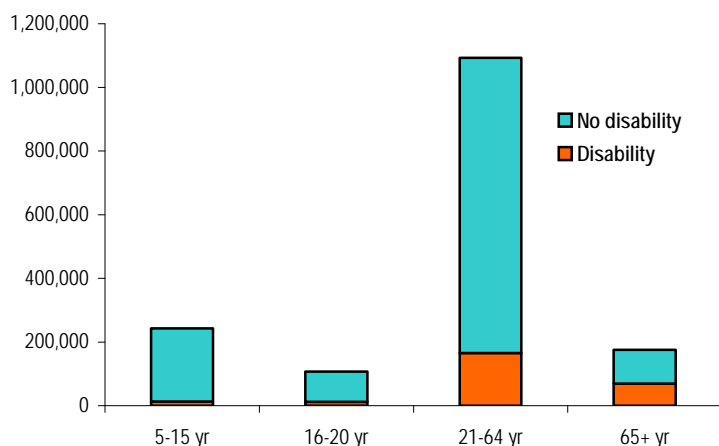
⁴ Freedman, V. A., Martin, L.G., & Schoeni, R.F.. Recent trends in disability and functioning among older adults in the United States: a systemic review, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 288, No. 24, December 2002, pp. 3137-3146.

⁵ Freedman, Vicki A. & Martin, Linda, G. Understanding trends in functional limitations among older Americans, *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 8, No. 10, October 1998, pp. 1457-1462.

Most People With Disabilities Are Not Older Adults

Nearly 20 percent of Americans have a disability, and 15% have severe disabilities.⁶ Although rates of disability in the County are higher among adults 65 and older, a higher number of adults with disabilities are in the 21-64 age range.

Figure 5. Number of Disabled/Non-Disabled County Residents by Age Group



Source: Census 2000

People with disabilities and chronic illnesses who require long term care consist of diverse populations. Although younger people with disabilities have many service needs in common with older adults, subgroups may have specific needs that differ from those of older adults.

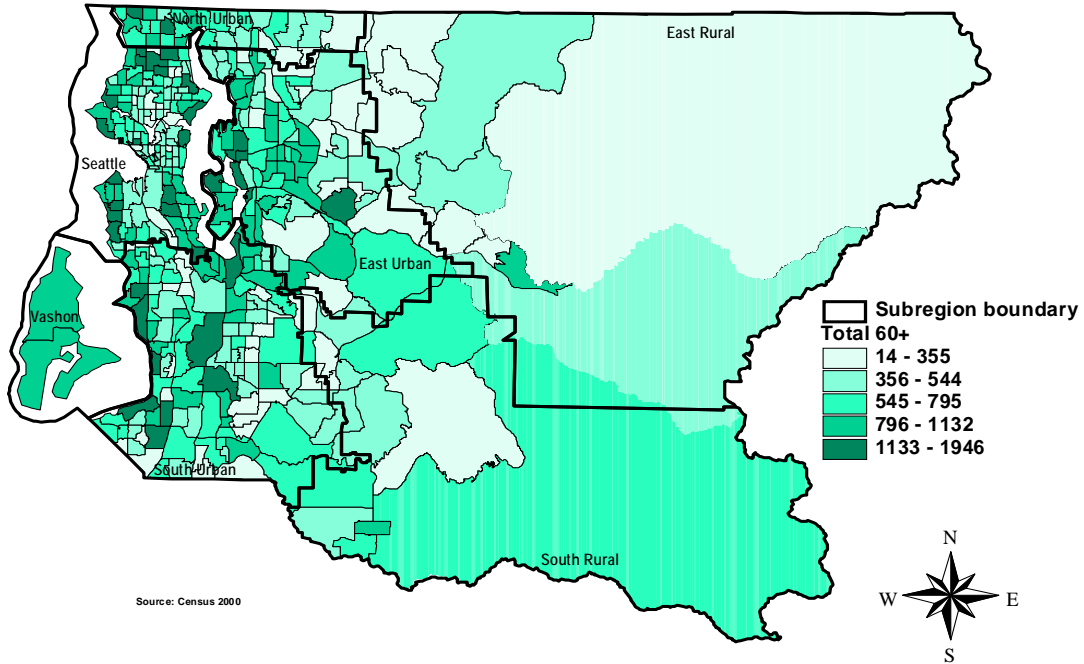
Nationally, the percentage of working-age persons with disabilities declined during the 90's, from 14.3% in 1990 to 10.3% in the year 2000. The percentage of these people unable to work due to their disability fell from 6% to 5.1% during this period. These declines followed three decades of increasing disability rates.

In the 90's, rates of disability due to back problems, arthritis and rheumatism, heart problems, and hypertension all declined somewhat. However, an increase was seen in disabilities attributed to mental health conditions.

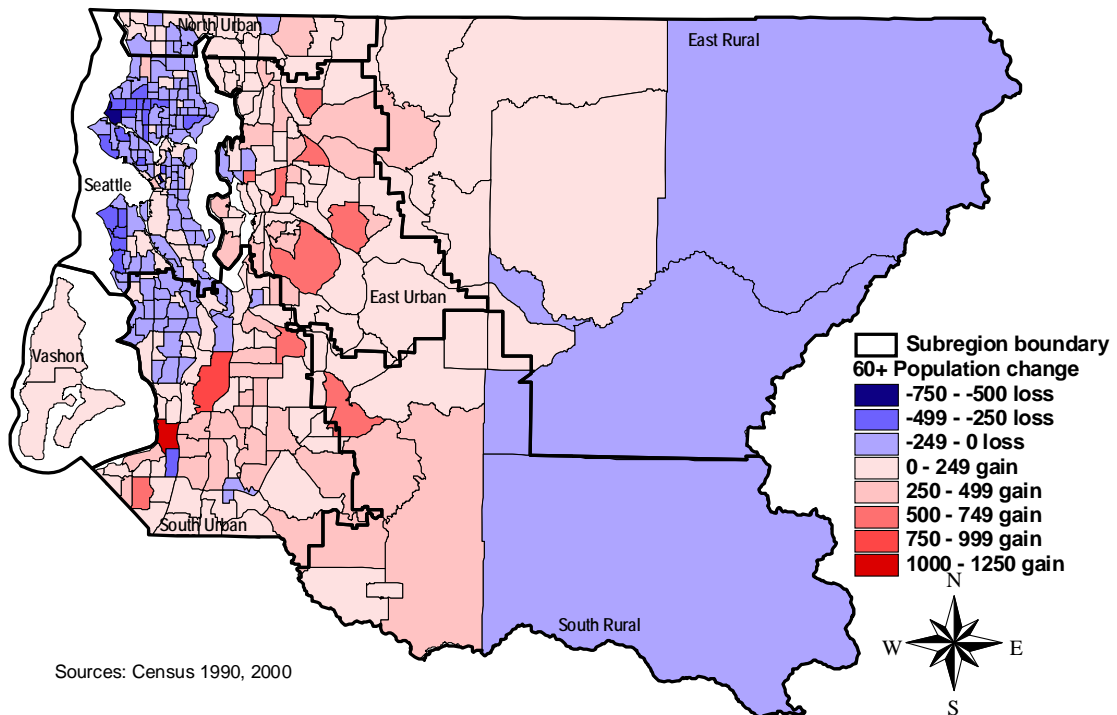
⁶ *Americans with Disabilities: Household Economic Studies* using data from the 1997 Survey of Income and Program Participation.

Appendix A. Maps

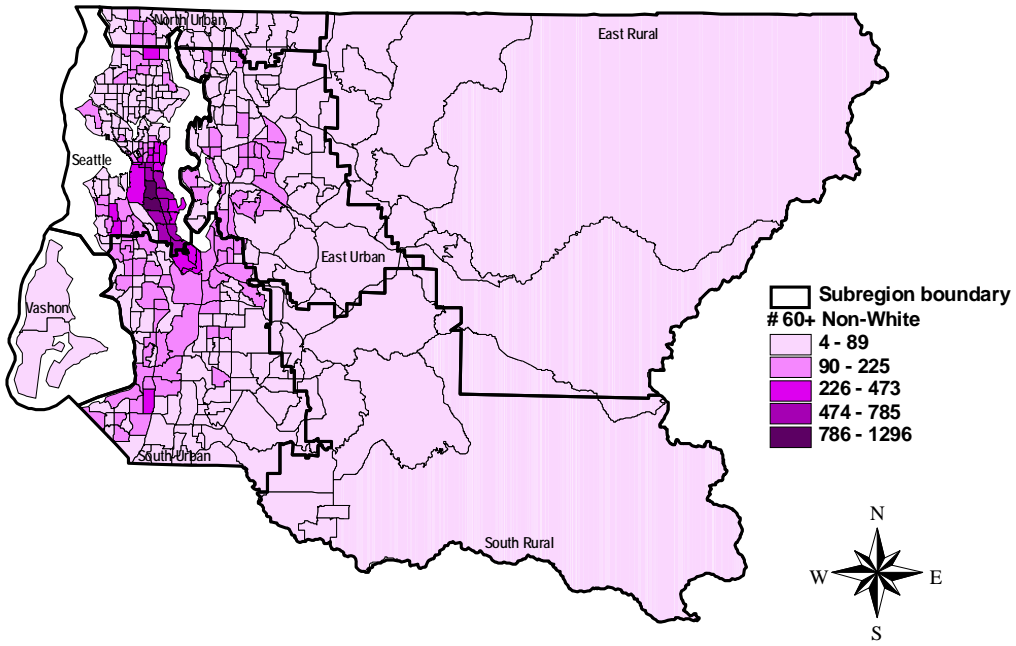
Map 1. Total 60+ Population, 2000



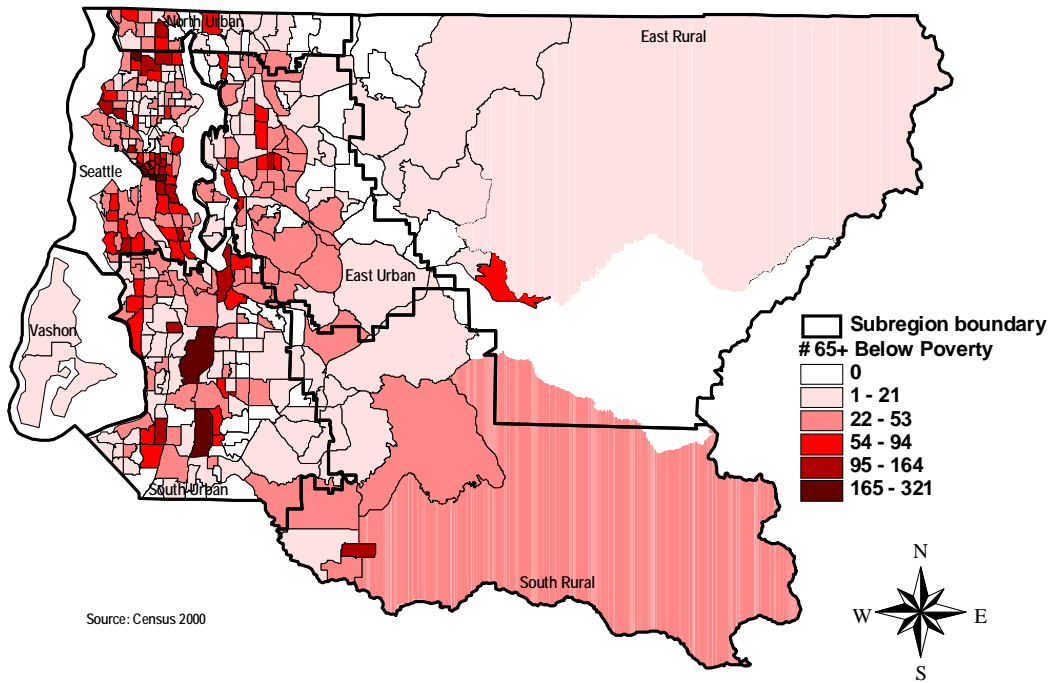
Map 2. Change in 60+ Population, 1990-2000



Map 3. 60+ Persons of Color

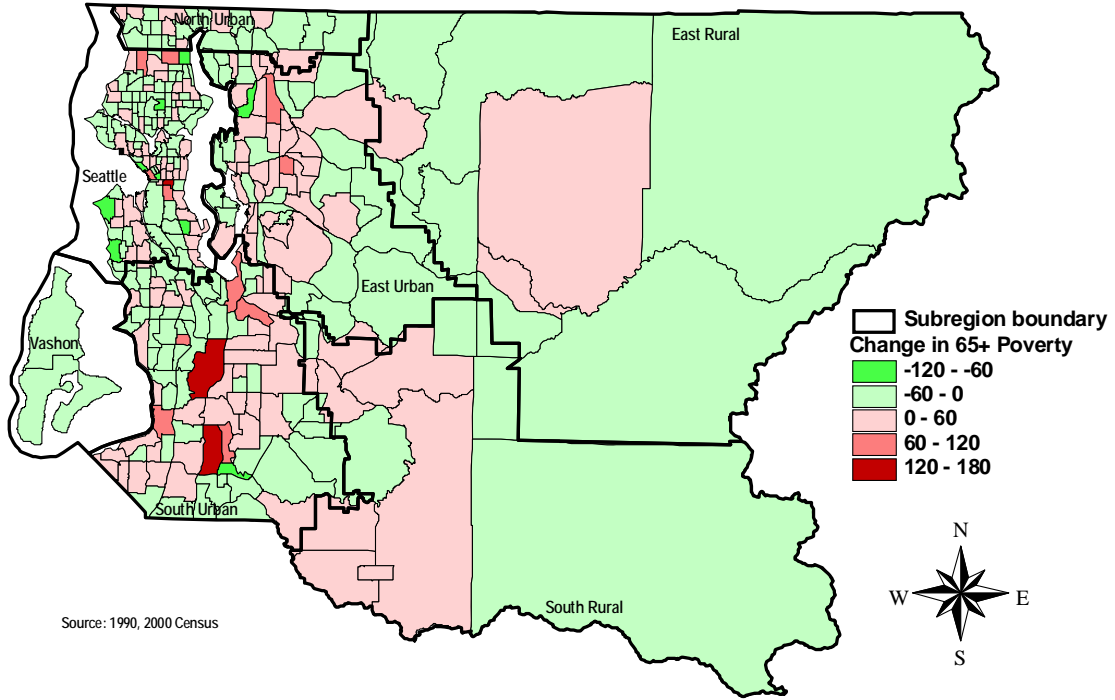


Map 4. 65+ Below Poverty



Source: Census 2000

Map 5. Change in the Number of 65+ Residents Below Poverty, 1990-2000



Map 6. 75+ Residents Who Live Alone

