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Baby Boom Health Approaching 60

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Context: Recent reports based on limited evidence suggest that members of the enormous U.S. Baby Boom generation born 1946 to 1964 might be less healthy than previous cohorts in middle age.

Objective: To compare the health of the Baby Boom generation to that of earlier cohorts using multiple non-clinical indicators of health, a full range of ages encompassing the Baby Boom, and data covering as long a time period as possible up to the present.

Design: Trend analysis of vital statistics data and self-reports of various health indicators from the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).

Participants: U.S. population ages 40 to 59: vital statistics death data are for all people these ages; NHIS annual sample sizes for five-year age groups range from 1,900 to 8,100 for particular health indicators and years.

Main Outcome Measures: Mortality (1982-2004); poor or fair health (1982-2006); nine specific conditions

(musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, obesity, vision, lung, diabetes, cancer, mental distress, and hearing; 1997-2006); difficulty with any of nine functional limitations (1997-2006); and needing help with personal care, routine needs, or either (1997-2006).

Results: In 2004, 58-year-olds, the leading edge of the Baby Boom, died at approximately the same rate (7.6 per 1000) as 54-year-olds in 1982. In 2006, the proportion of the oldest members of the Baby Boom reporting poor/fair health (20.4%) was comparable to the proportion for those six years younger in 1982. From 1997 to 2006, the prevalence of reports of some diseases increased, but this trend may reflect improvements in diagnosis and treatment in some cases. The prevalence of functional limitations and prevalence of most measures of disability were stable.

Conclusions: Trends varied by specific health indicator, time period, and age range, but overall Baby Boomers appeared to be doing as well as, if not better than, those of similar ages in the past.