

the Affordable Care Act in 2010 included ways to close the coverage gaps. The MMA, and the Affordable Care Act are discussed further in Chapter 9.

In 2005, the fifth White House Conference on Aging was held. Among the top 10 resolutions sent to Congress was a new emphasis on ensuring that older Americans have transportation options that will contribute to continuing independence and mobility, promoting new models of noninstitutional long-term care, and improving the recognition, assessment, and treatment of mental illness and depression in the elderly (White House Conference on Aging, 2005). This conference also held a degree of scandal, when George W. Bush became the first president to refuse to address it.

Today, gerontological social workers are employed in hospitals and medical centers, Adult Protective Services, veterans' services, adult day care centers, private geriatric care agencies, family service organizations, hospices, and at the macro level in Area Agencies on Aging. Gerontological social workers continue to advocate for older people. Currently, advocacy groups are pressing for a universal health care plan that would cover the costs of long-term health care and for increasing the support of informal caregivers.

Current Context

Older people, as defined by the US Census Bureau, are 65 years old and over. They are often categorized in three groups: the young-old (ages 65–74 years); the old-old (ages 75–84 years); and the oldest-old (ages 85 years and over). Approximately, one in every seven Americans, or 15 percent of the population, is old. This segment of the population includes more than 26 million women and 21 million men (Administration on Aging, 2016).

LO2 During the twenty-first century, the percentage of the population that is older will increase dramatically. There are three primary reasons for the increase. First, fewer children are being born. Second, between 2010 and 2030, the baby-boom generation will begin to reach the age of 65. By 2030, when the last of the baby boomers reach 65, one in five Americans will be 65 or older. By 2050, it is projected that there will be 88.5 million Americans over the age of 65, which is more than double the current number, and at least 21 percent of the population will be old (Administration on Aging, 2016). **Baby boomers**, Americans born between 1946 and 1964, make up the largest age cohort in the US population. Their aging will necessitate a vast increase in health, recreation, housing, and nutrition services for people who are older, as well as increases in entitlement programs, such as Social Security. Third, people will continue to live longer. A child born today can expect to live for almost 79 years on average, as compared to 47 years for someone born in 1900 (CDC, 2013), and those who are 65 today will live, on average, for almost another 20 years (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2012).

The oldest-old, who are also called frail older people, are projected to be the fastest-growing segment of the population in the twenty-first century (see Box 8.2). The number of people over the age of 85 is expected to more than triple between 2008 and 2050, when the number may reach more than 21 million (Administration on Aging, 2016). The majority of the over-85 cohort

Box 8.2 More About...the Group of People Who Are Older

In 2015, there were 47.8 million people over 65 years of age. Of them,

- 27.1 million were between the ages of 65 and 74.
- 15.2 million were between the ages of 75 and 84, AND
- 5.5 million were 85 and older.

Source: Administration on Aging (2016).

will be women. The healthy aging of the oldest-old in the twenty-first century is due to improved medical technologies such as heart bypass, hip replacement, and cataract surgery; less smoking; improved diet and nutrition; and better medications.

Only a small percentage of professional social workers are primarily employed in the practice area of aging, yet a majority of social workers work with older adults in some capacity in their jobs (Worthington, 2008). With the growth in our aging population, the need for gerontological social workers is increasing steadily. In fact, the Bureau of Labor statistics cites employment for social workers with a gerontological background as one of the fastest growing areas (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Most gerontological social work jobs require a master's degree in social work or a graduate degree with a certificate in gerontology. A bachelor of social work (BSW) degree does not provide the necessary skills, particularly clinical skills, to work in many settings with the elderly. However, there are BSW-level geriatric social work positions in Area Agencies on Aging, senior centers, skilled nursing facilities, and hospitals.

Services provided by gerontological social workers vary from setting to setting. **Adult Protective Services (APS)** workers investigate reported cases of elder abuse, neglect, and self-neglect. They arrange emergency shelter and transportation for victims, and facilitate the victims' return home or to alternative long-term living arrangements. Adult foster care (AFC) adult care homes (ACH), and assisted living (AL) facilities are alternatives to institutional placement for some older clients. In AFC and ACH settings, there is a concerted effort to maintain a family home environment. Sizes of AFC and ACH homes can range from 1 to 20 clients. These settings are most commonly housed in private homes in the community. This differs from AL facilities that can house hundreds of clients and typically utilize apartment-like settings.

Adult day care is the provision of community-based services in a group setting. It has two purposes: (1) to help older clients maintain a certain level of independence and remain in their homes and communities and (2) to provide respite for caregivers. Many centers provide services for special populations, including people with Alzheimer's disease, AIDS, mental illness, visual impairment, or hearing loss (Rosenwald, 2007). **Adult day care social workers** provide case management services and facilitate different types of groups, including bereavement and grief groups, reality-orientation groups for elderly adults who are cognitively impaired, and educational or self-help groups.

Gerontological social workers in health care settings such as skilled nursing facilities, hospitals, home health care agencies, and hospice care facilities