Colorado's Demographic Outlook

Kate Watkins, PhD
State Demographer

10-County Budget Conference
September 18, 2025
Glenwood Springs, Colorado

COLORADO
Department of Local Affairs
State Demography Office

Key Population Trends

US   CO

> Lower fertility rates = Fewer births

> Aging = More deaths

> Slower population growth

> Net migration a key population growth driver
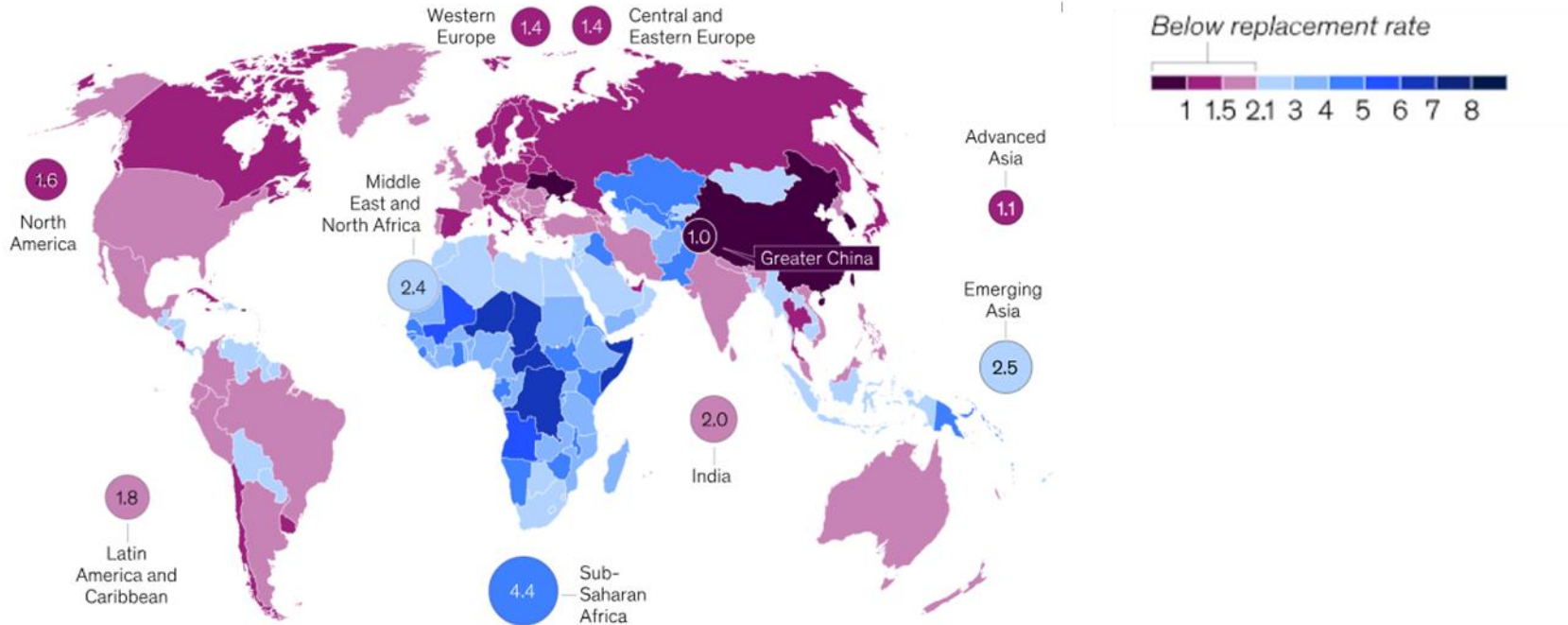
> Increasingly more diverse

Global Trends

Fertility rates are declining everywhere

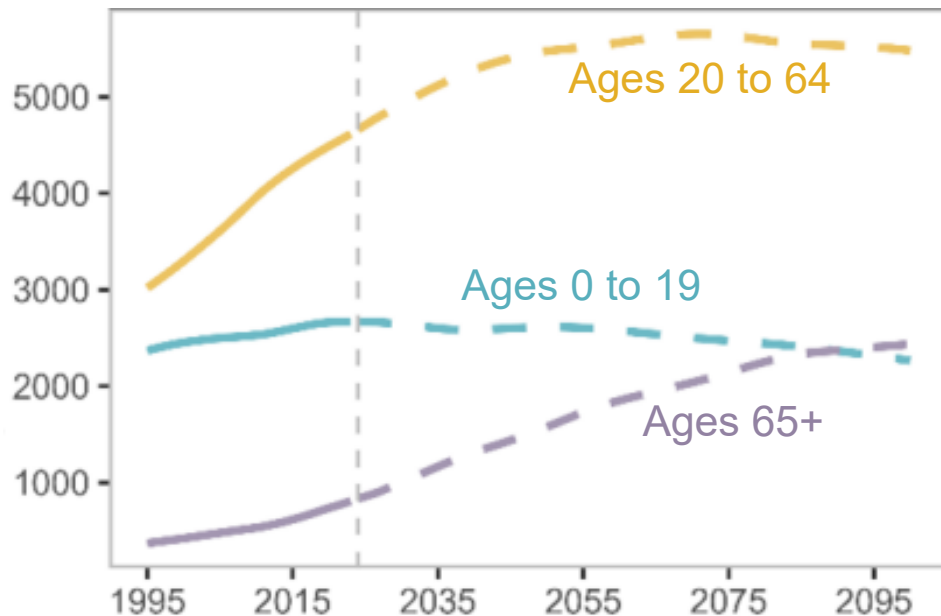**Total fertility rate by country,** live births per woman — 2023

Western Europe 1.4 · Central and Eastern Europe 1.4 · North America 1.6 · Middle East and North Africa 2.4 · Advanced Asia 1.1 · Greater China 1.0 · Emerging Asia 2.5 · India 2.0 · Latin America and Caribbean 1.8 · Sub-Saharan Africa 4.4

Below replacement rate: 1 1.5 2.1 3 4 5 6 7 8

Global Population Slowing and Aging

World Population

- Strongest growth in the 65+ population
- School-age population in decline
- Near-term rise in the working-age population

U.S. Population Slowing and Aging

Millions of People
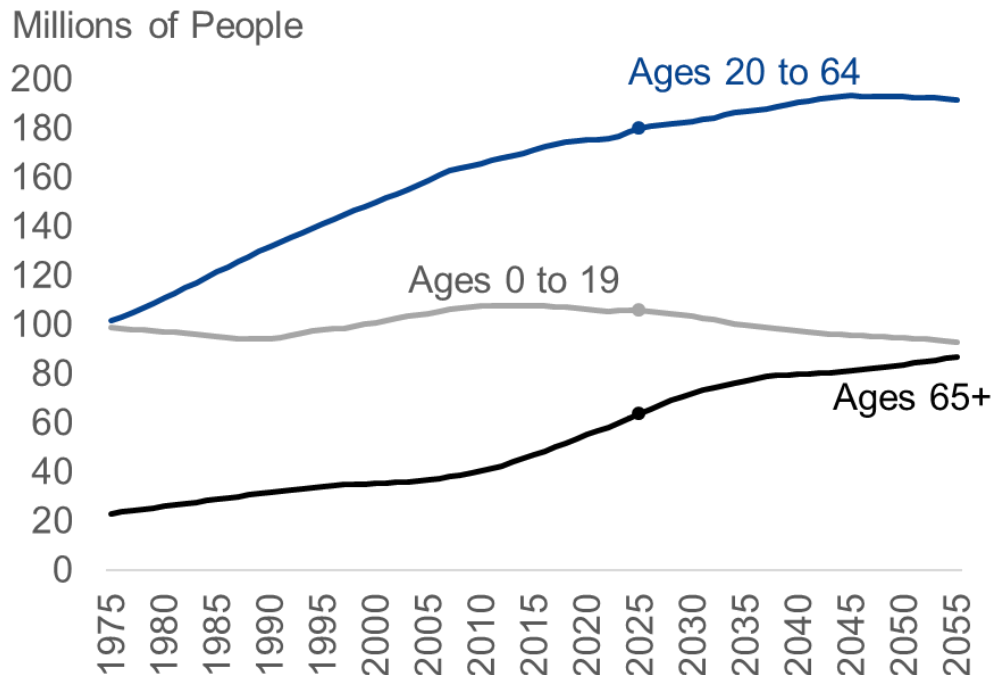
- Strongest growth in the 65+ population
- School-age population in decline
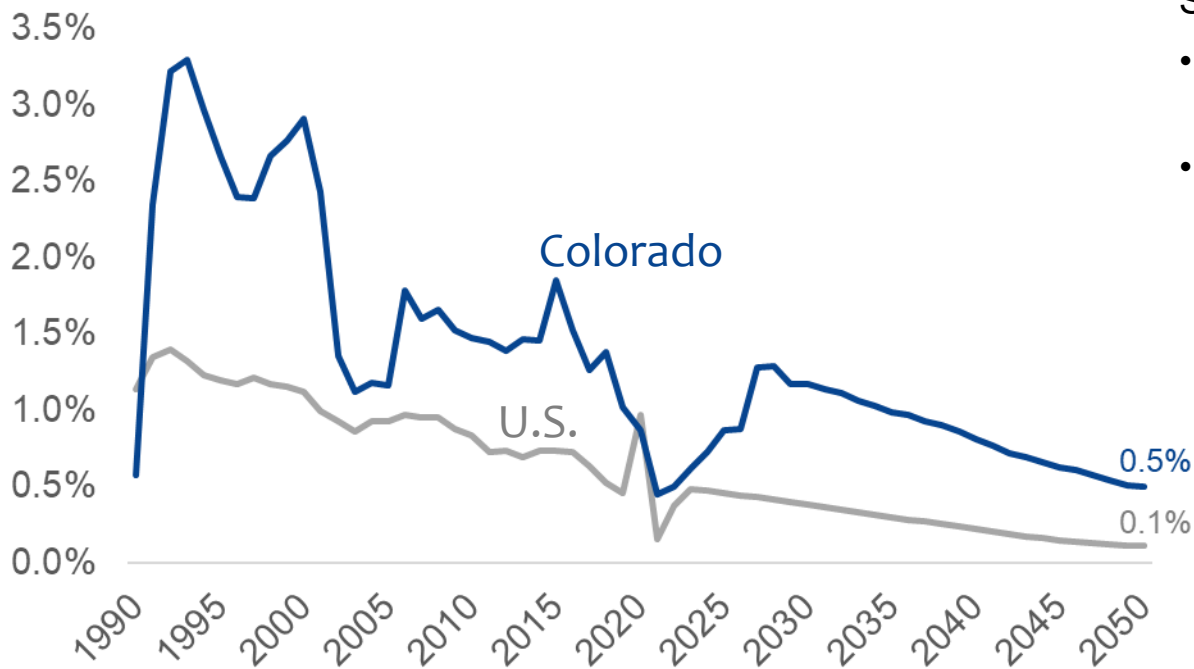- Near-term rise in the working-age population

Colorado Trends

Population growth rates are slowing

Annual Population Percent Change

Slowing U.S. Population Growth

- Some states are already shrinking
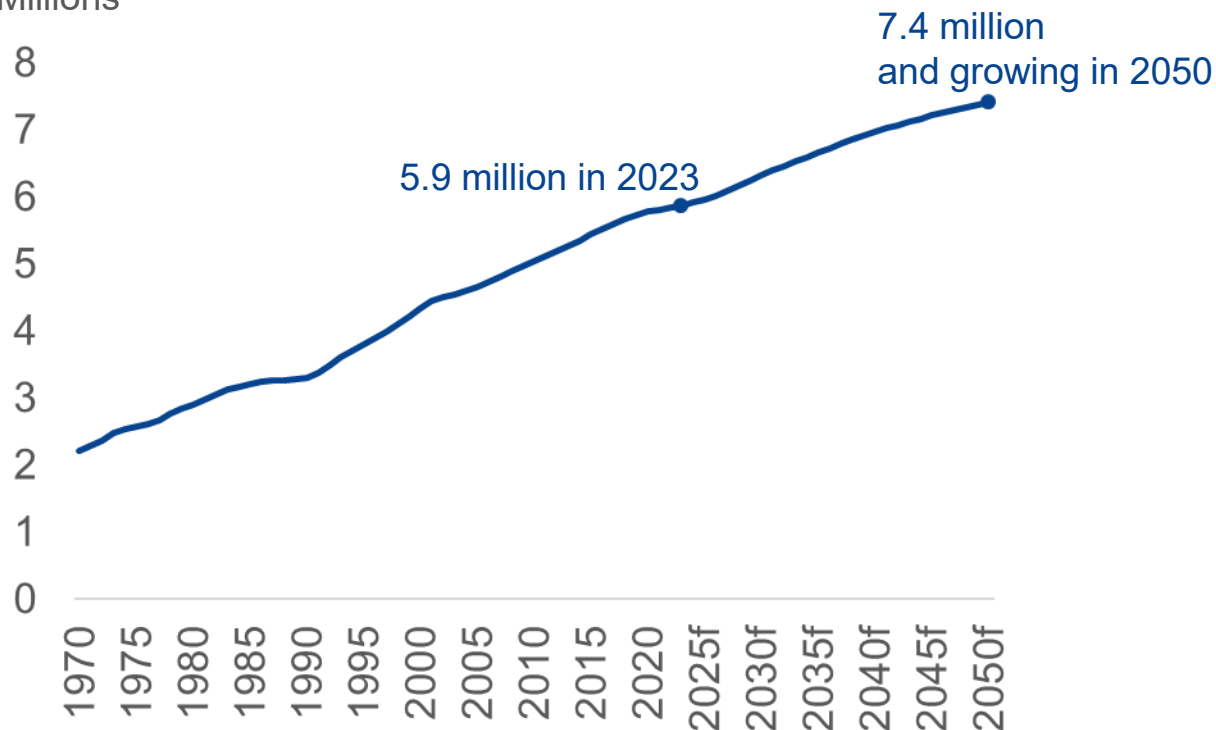- Slower U.S. growth will impact Colorado's growth

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections; U.S. Census Bureau population projections, main series 2022-2100.
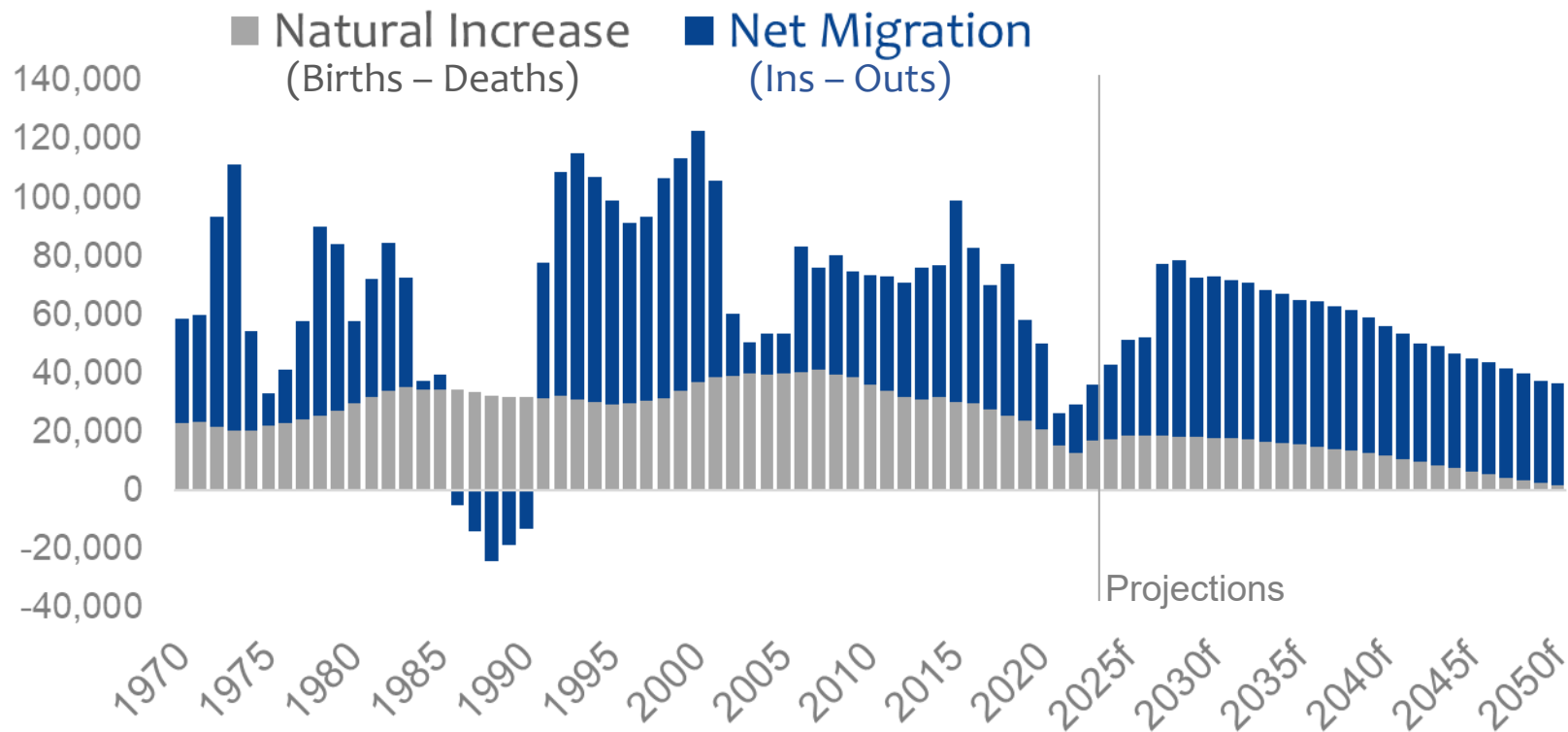
Colorado's Population

Millions

7.4 million
and growing in 2050

5.9 million in 2023

Average Annual Growth by Decade

1970s	68,000	2.7%
1980s	40,000	1.3%
1990s	104,000	2.8%
2000s	71,000	1.5%
2010s	73,000	1.4%
2020s	54,000	0.9%
2030s	65,000	1.0%
2040s	45,000	0.6%

Colorado Components of Population Change

■ Natural Increase (Births – Deaths)   ■ Net Migration (Ins – Outs)

Projections

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.

cdola.colorado.gov   10

Colorado Net Migration

CO

Domestic

International

Fertility rates continue to decline

Colorado Fertility Rate by Age

Significant declines in young female fertility

Increases in older female fertility
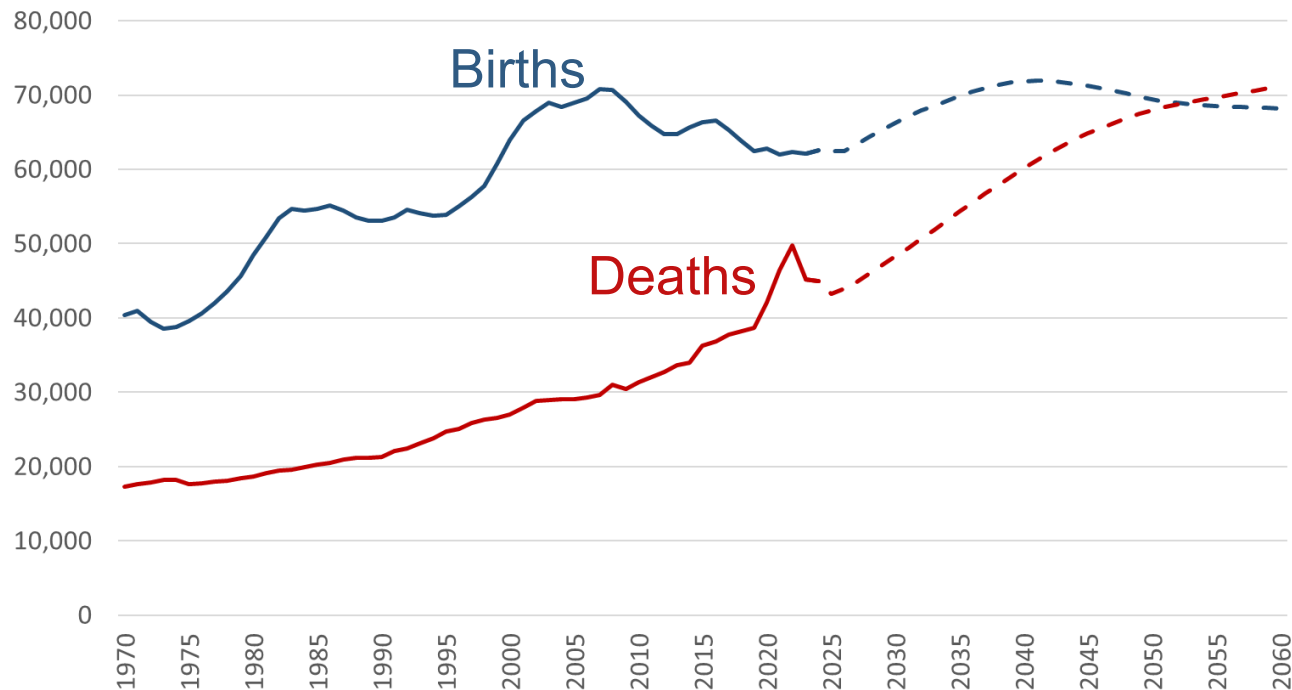
Legend: 1970, 1990, 2010, 2030, 2050
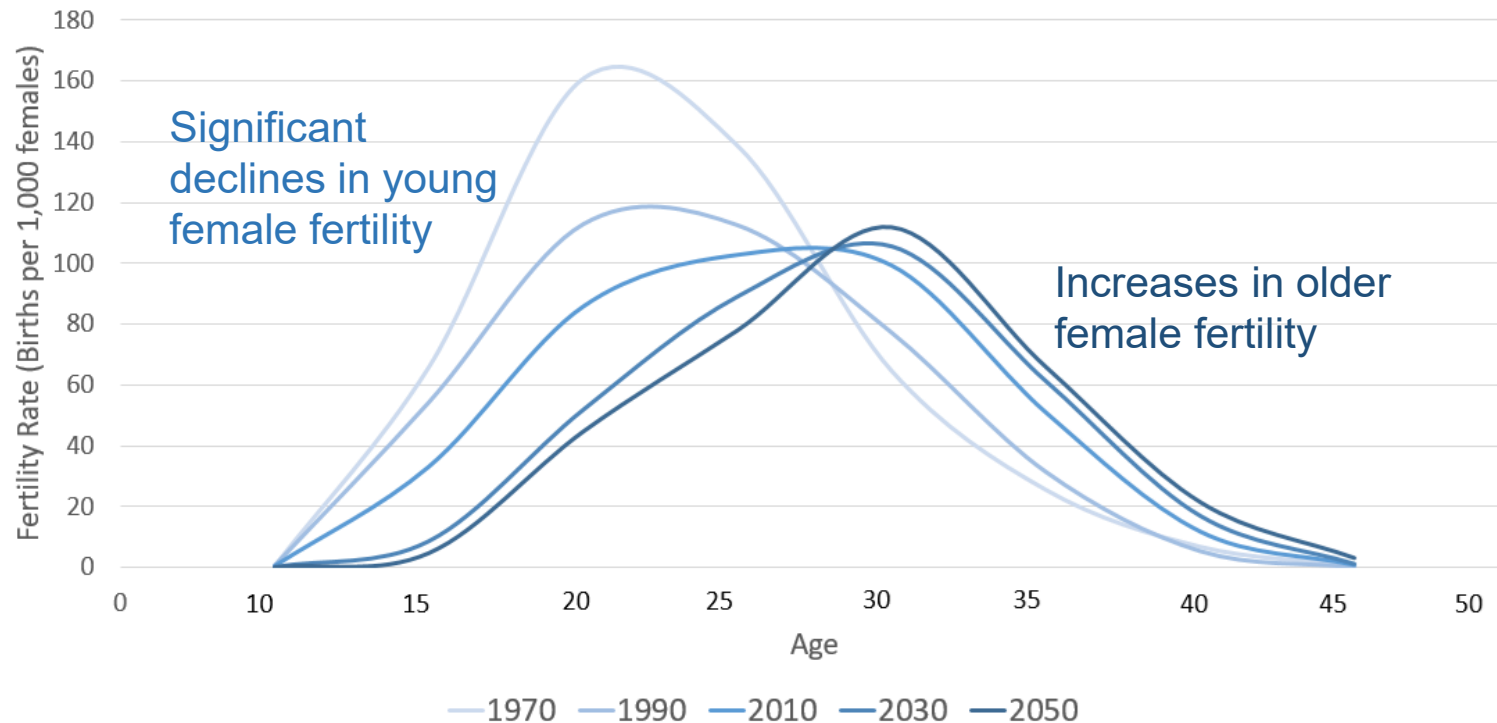
Source: Colorado Demography Office vintage 2023 estimates and projections; Colorado birth estimates from Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 2024.

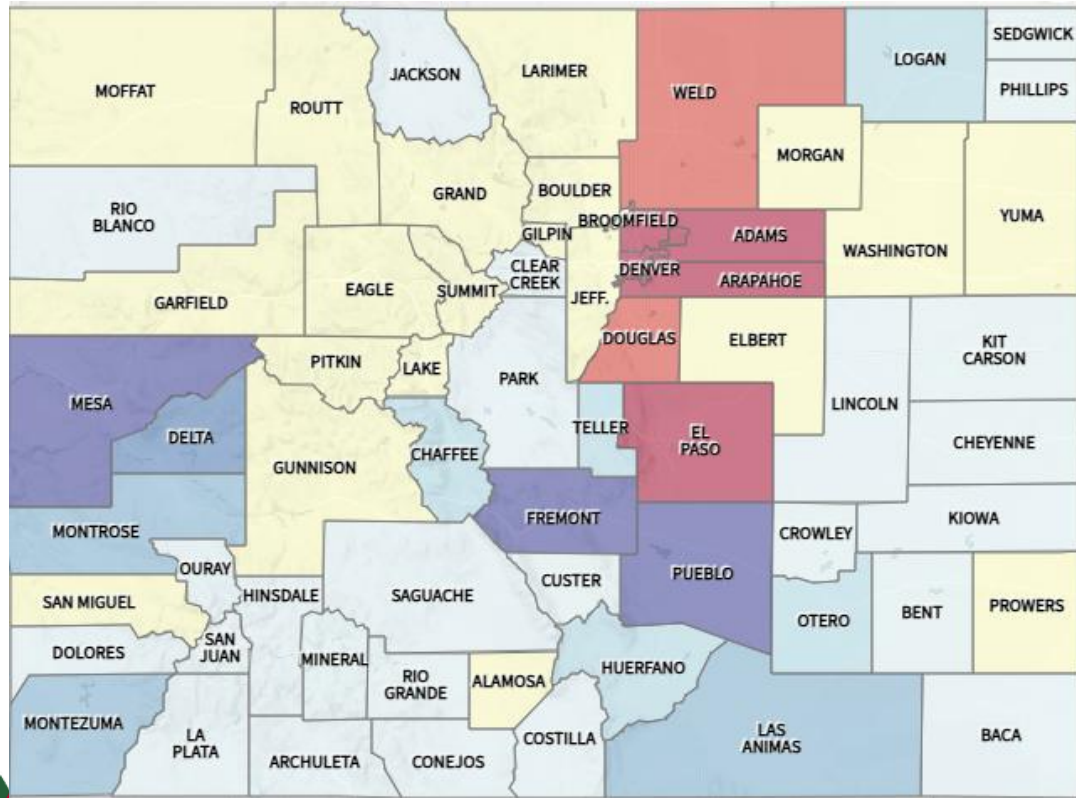# Colorado deaths expected to overtake births in 2053
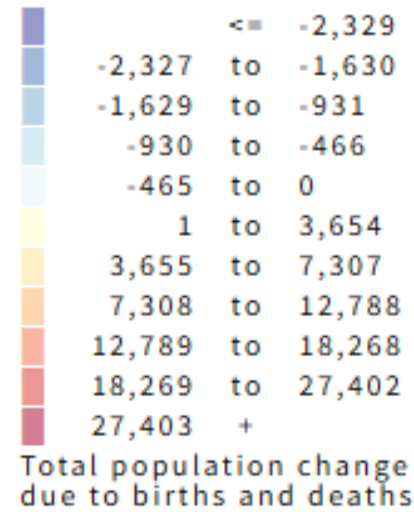
Colorado Births and Deaths

- Births expected to increase as Millennials reach peak fertility age

- More deaths due to population aging

- Colorado enters natural decline in 2053 vs. the U.S. in 2031

Source: Colorado Demography Office vintage 2023 estimates and projections.
https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/html/netmighist.html

Natural change, 2020 to 2030

From 2020 to 2030,
35 counties expected to experience natural decline

	Total population change due to births and deaths
	<= -2,329
	-2,327 to -1,630
	-1,629 to -931
	-930 to -466
	-465 to 0
	1 to 3,654
	3,655 to 7,307
	7,308 to 12,788
	12,789 to 18,268
	18,269 to 27,402
	27,403 +

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.

Colorado Net Migration by Age

Net Migrants, 2010 to 2020

Denver County Net Migration by Age

Net Migrants, 2010 to 2020

Arapahoe County Net Migration by Age

Net Migrants, 2010 to 2020
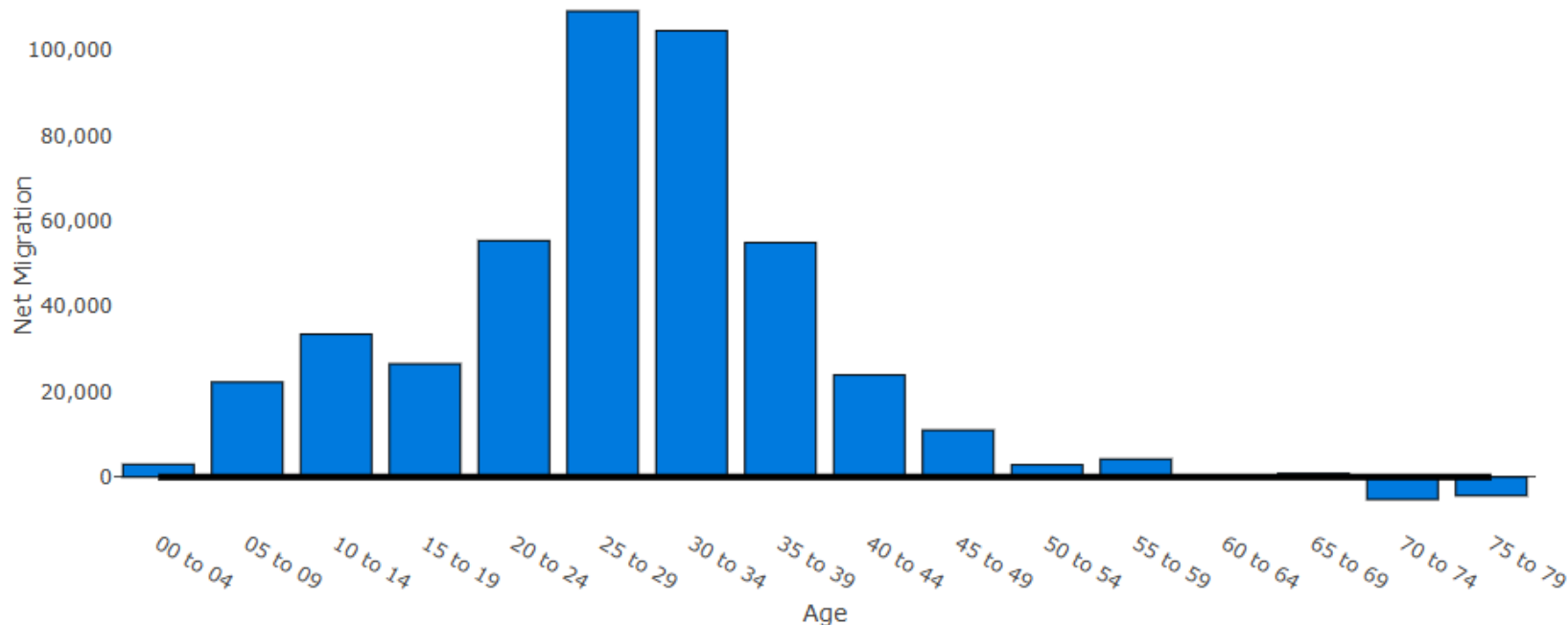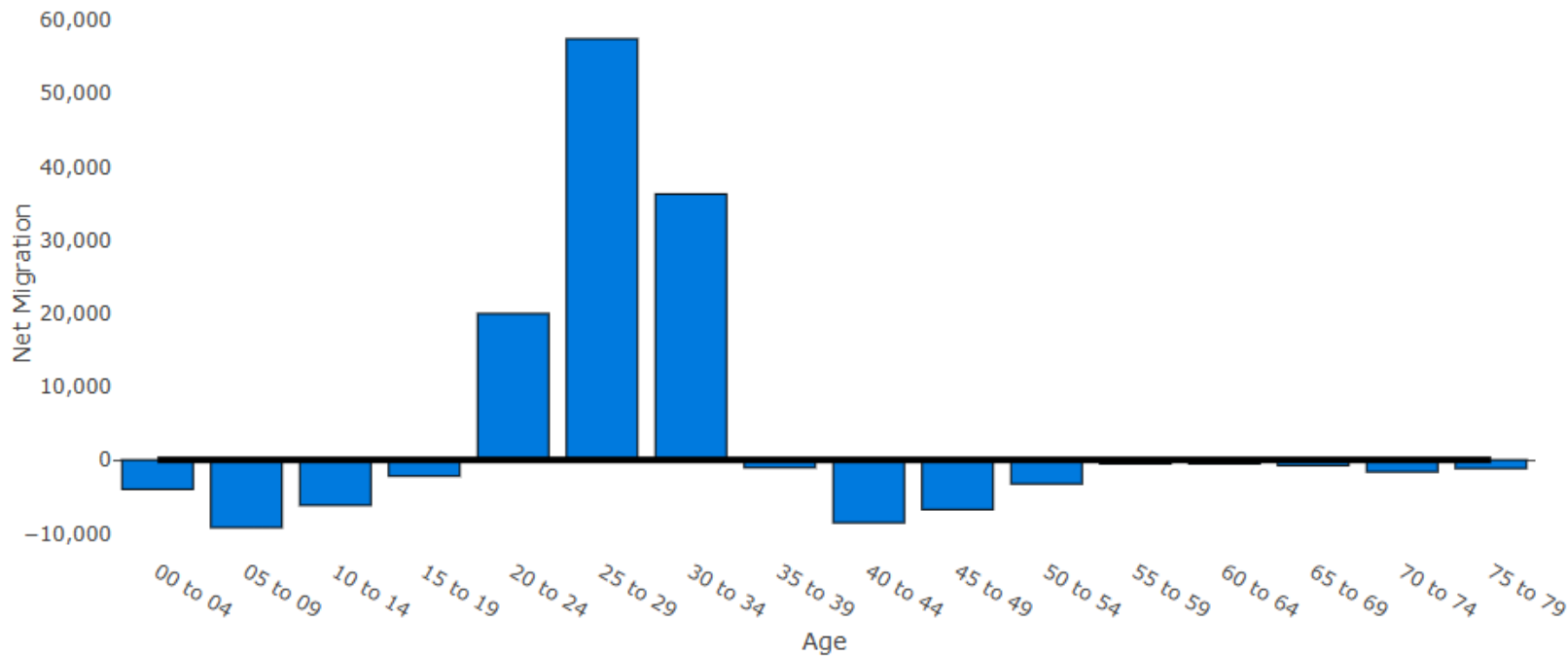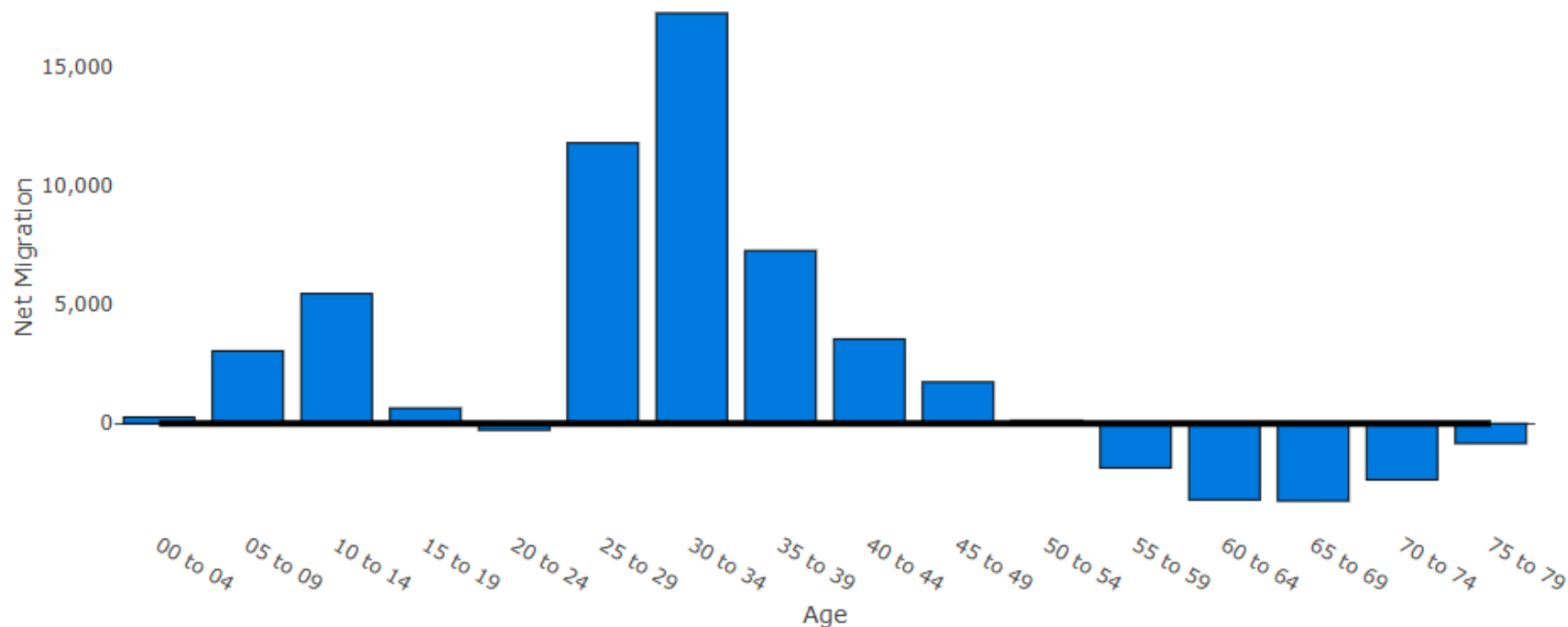
Source: State Demography Office analysis of U.S. Census Bureau 2020 and 2010 data.
https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/html/netmigcomp.html

Weld County Net Migration by Age

Net Migrants, 2010 to 2020

Mesa County Net Migration by Age

Net Migrants, 2010 to 2020

People and the Economy
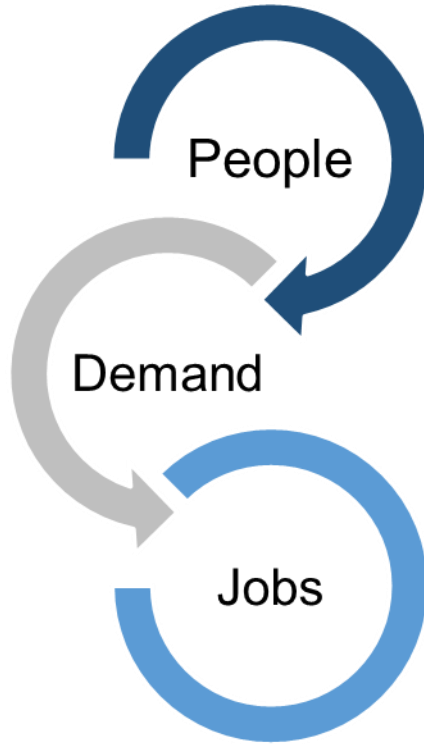
"Jobs are people"

"Houses are where those jobs go to sleep"

Colorado Population Forecast Methodology

Cohort-component

+Births - Deaths

→

+ Net Migration

→

X LFPR

→

Labor Supply

Economic forecast

Jobs

→

- 2nd & 3rd job

→

- Commuters

→

Labor Demand

=
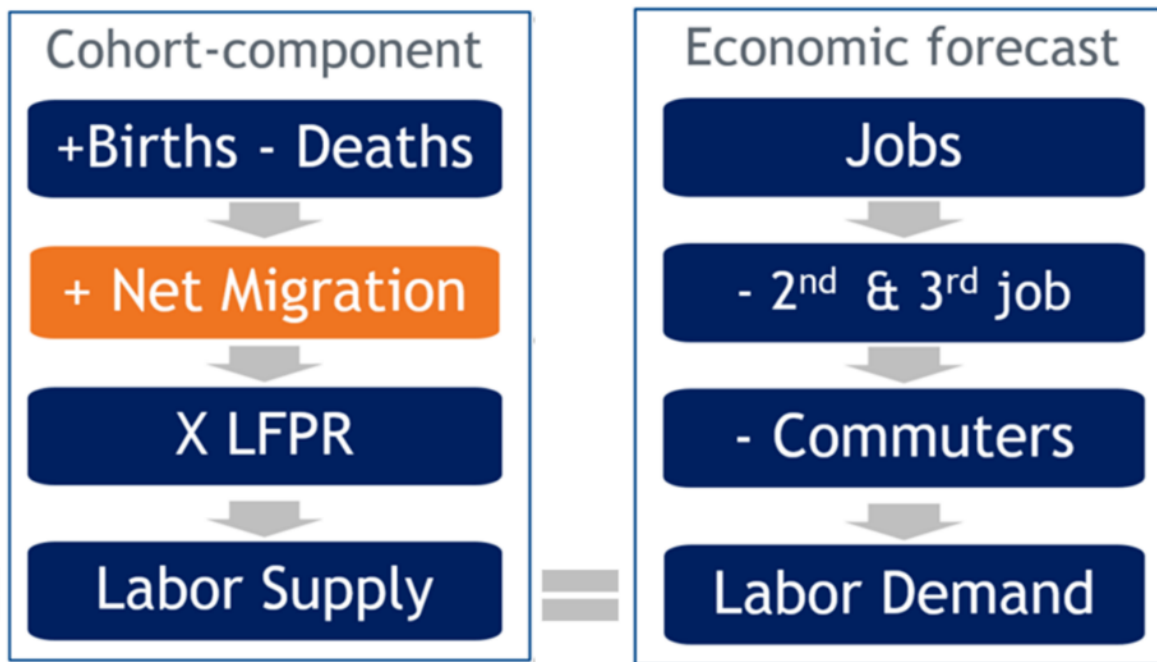
Differences between supply and demand
resolved by net migration

U.S. growth is important

Jobs are people

Age matters

Job demand and
expected retirements
drive migration

Colorado's long-term forecast

Projected Population Change
2020 - 2050

Population Change
- < -1,000
- -1,000 to 0
- 1 to 5,000
- 5,001 to 20,000
- 20,001 to 50,000
- 50,001 to 200,000
- > 200,000

Source: Colorado State Demography Office

October 2024
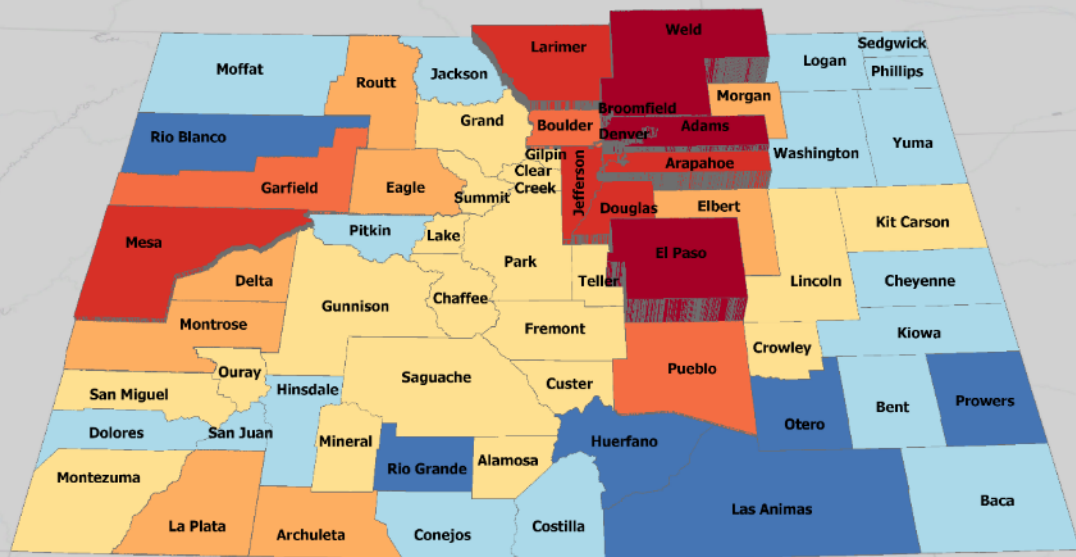
Statewide of increase 1.5 million people between 2023 and 2050

1.4 million along the Front Range (90%)
- 768,800 Denver-Boulder (50%)
- 339,177 North Front Range (22%)
- 260,500 South Front Range (27%)

Net migration to the state is needed to support this growth

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.

Aging Matters

Why Aging Matters

- Lower labor force participation means **more competition for talent**

- **Shifts in demand** for goods and services

- Supply and demand for **housing** (near-term pressure)

- **Income** sources and amounts evolve as we age

- Downward pressure on federal, state, and local **government tax** revenue; upward pressure on **government expenditures**

Colorado's population by age and generation, 2023

CO

2023

View animated changes in populations over time:
https://gis.dola.colorado.gov/Age-Animation-Bars/

Legend:
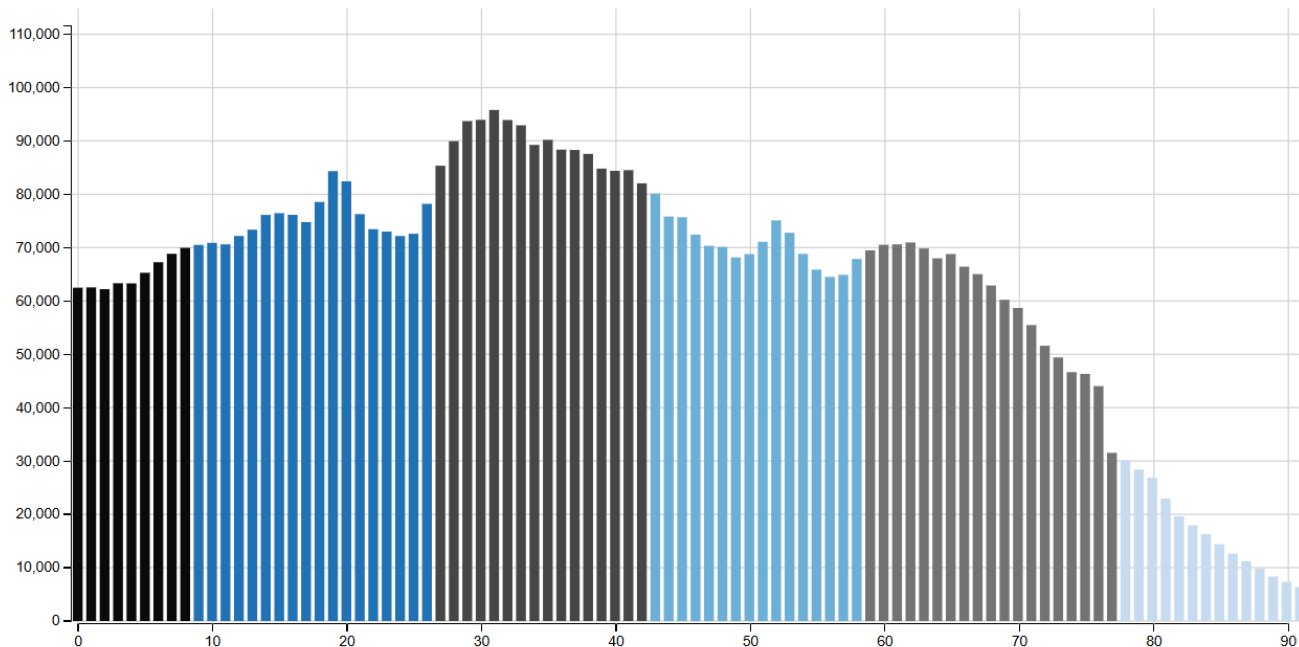
- Future Generations (2030 -)
- Generation Alpha (2015 - 2029)
- Generation Z (1997 - 2014)
- Millennials (1981 - 1996)
- Generation X (1965 - 1980)
- Baby Boomers (1946 - 1964)
- Silent Generation (1928 - 1945)
- Greatest Generation (- 1927)

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.

Colorado's population by age and generation, 2050
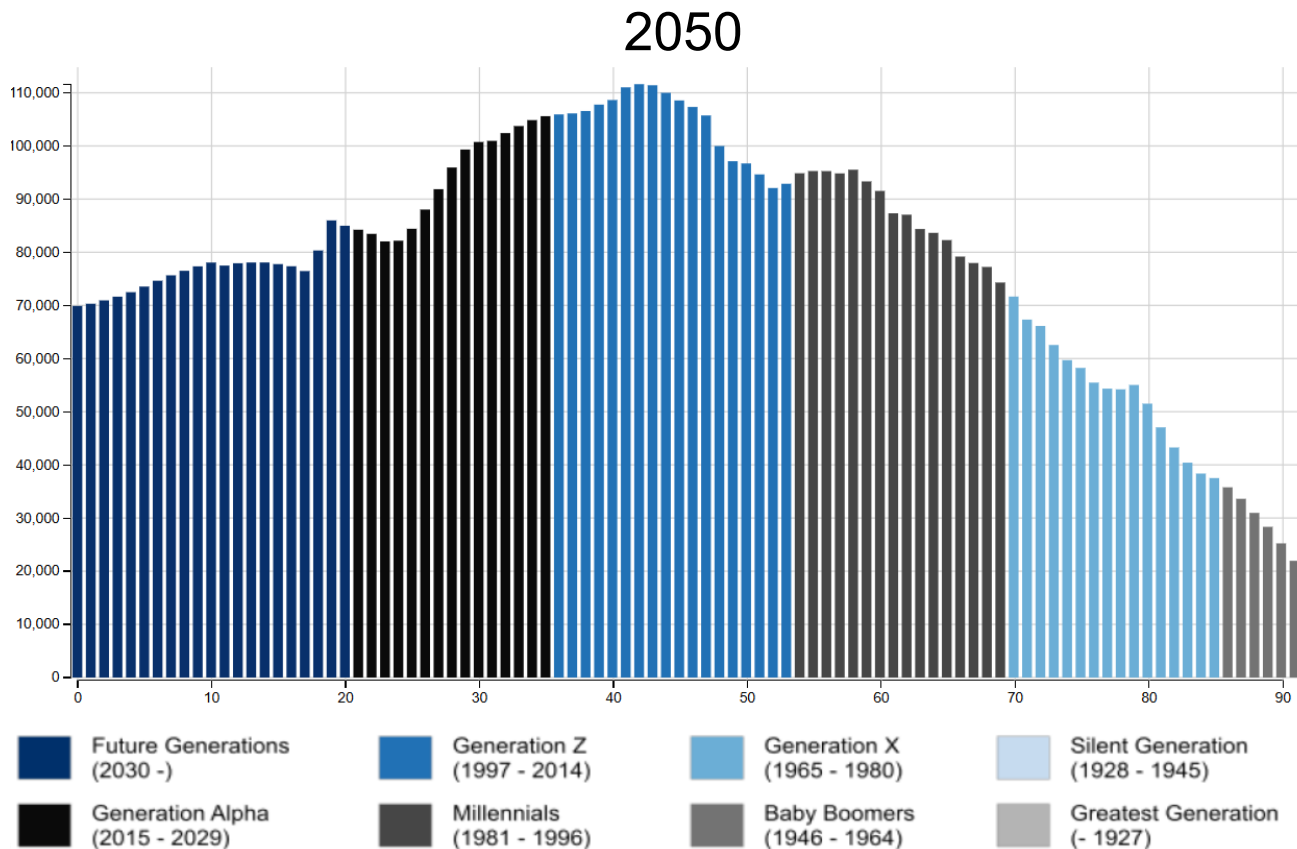
2050

| Future Generations (2030 -) | Generation Z (1997 - 2014) | Generation X (1965 - 1980) | Silent Generation (1928 - 1945) |
| Generation Alpha (2015 - 2029) | Millennials (1981 - 1996) | Baby Boomers (1946 - 1964) | Greatest Generation (- 1927) |

View animated changes in populations over time:
https://gis.dola.colorado.gov/Age-Animation-Bars/

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.

Every county has a unique age composition

CO
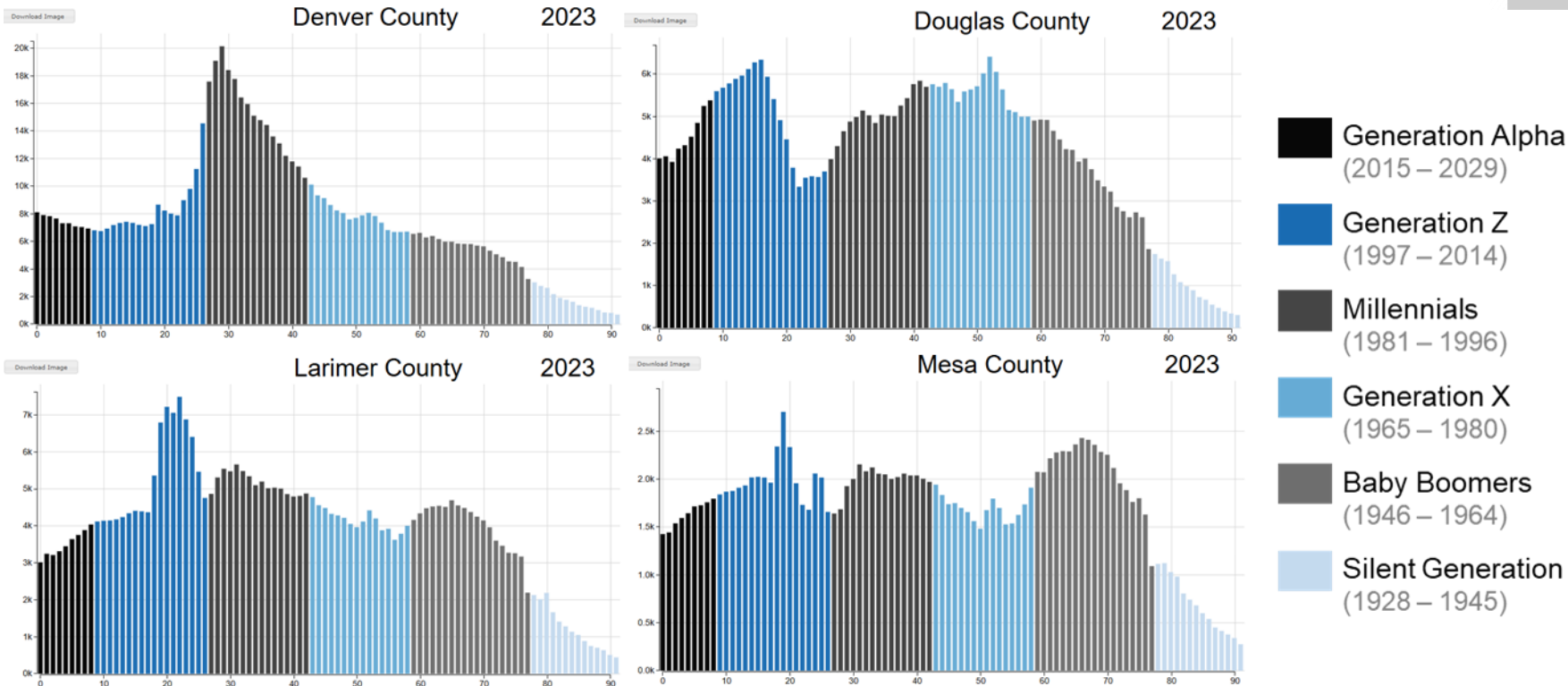
Denver County 2023

Douglas County 2023

Larimer County 2023

Mesa County 2023

Generation Alpha (2015 – 2029)

Generation Z (1997 – 2014)

Millennials (1981 – 1996)

Generation X (1965 – 1980)

Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964)

Silent Generation (1928 – 1945)

Income and spending rises and then falls with age

Average U.S. Income

All Other
Dividends, Interest, Rent
Social Security & Retirement Income
Wages, Salaries, Business Income

Average U.S. Income Tax

State & Local Income Tax

Federal Income Tax

Average U.S. Consumer Spending

- Food
- Housing
- Transportation
- Healthcare
- Entertaintment
- Personal insurance and pensions
- All Other
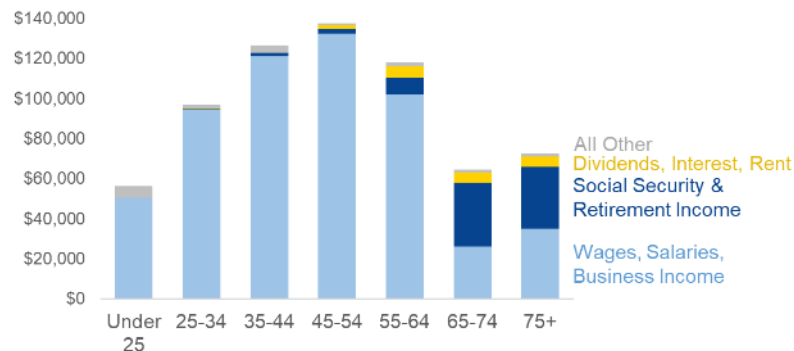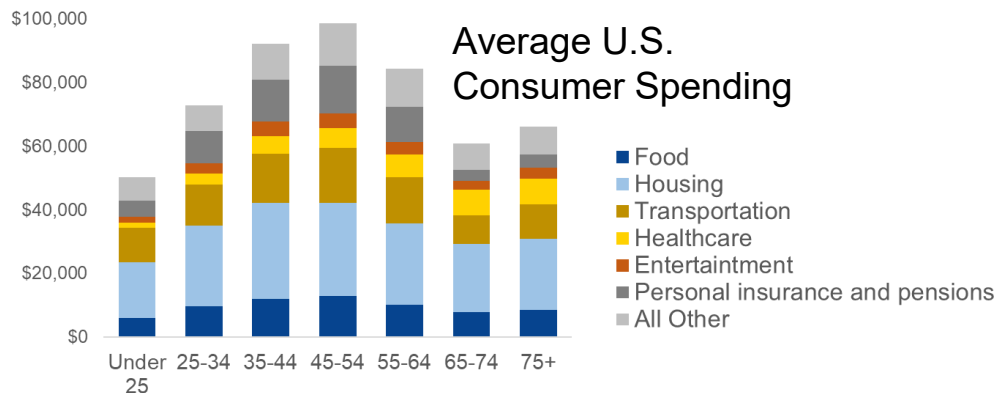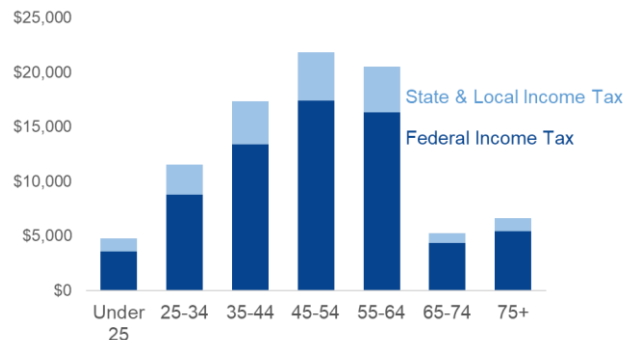
Aging will…
- Impact our labor markets
- Impact our tax base
- Shift consumer spending

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023 Consumer Expenditure Survey.

Colorado's population by age over time

Population

Most likely to work

2050
2040
2030
2020

Age

- Populations aged 25 to 54 projected to grow through 2050

- However, we need positive net migration averaging 40,000 to 60,000 per year to support this growth

- Growth in the 65+ population reflect aging in place

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.
https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/html/population.html
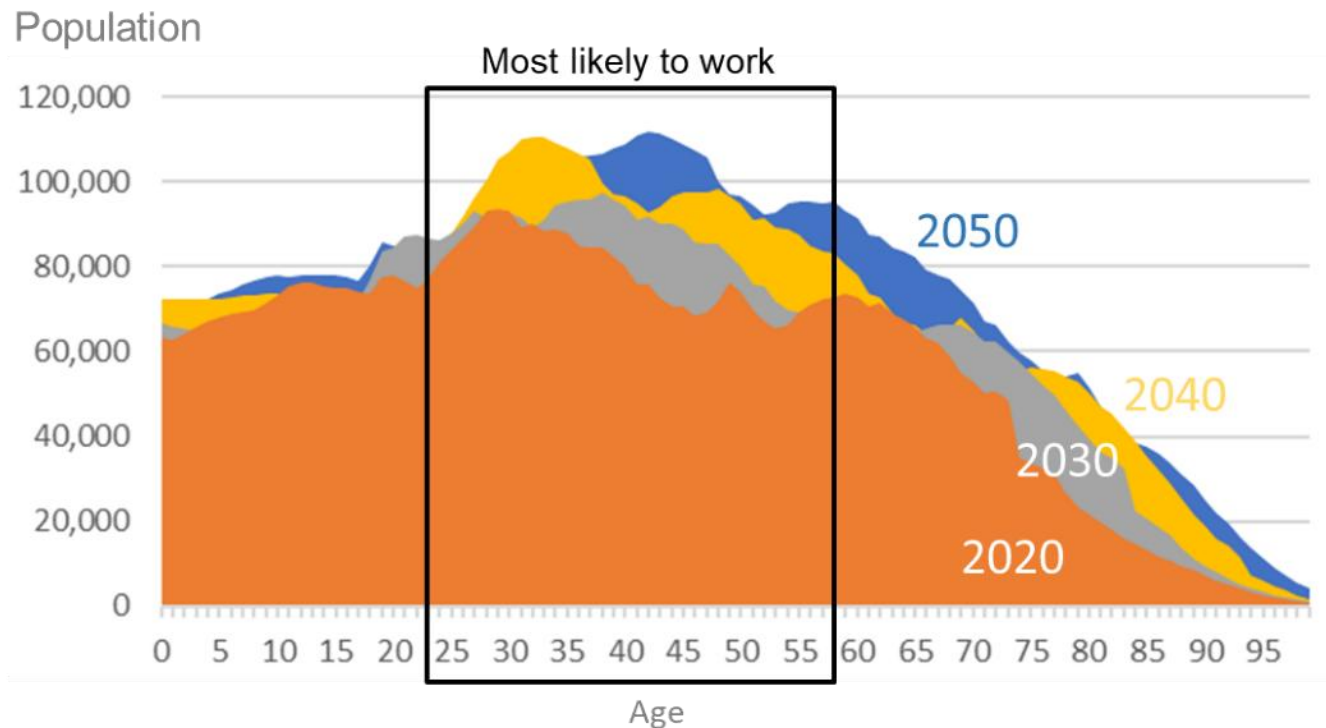
cdola.colorado.gov   29

Workers vs. Retirees in Colorado

Ratio of those Age 25 to 54 to those 65+
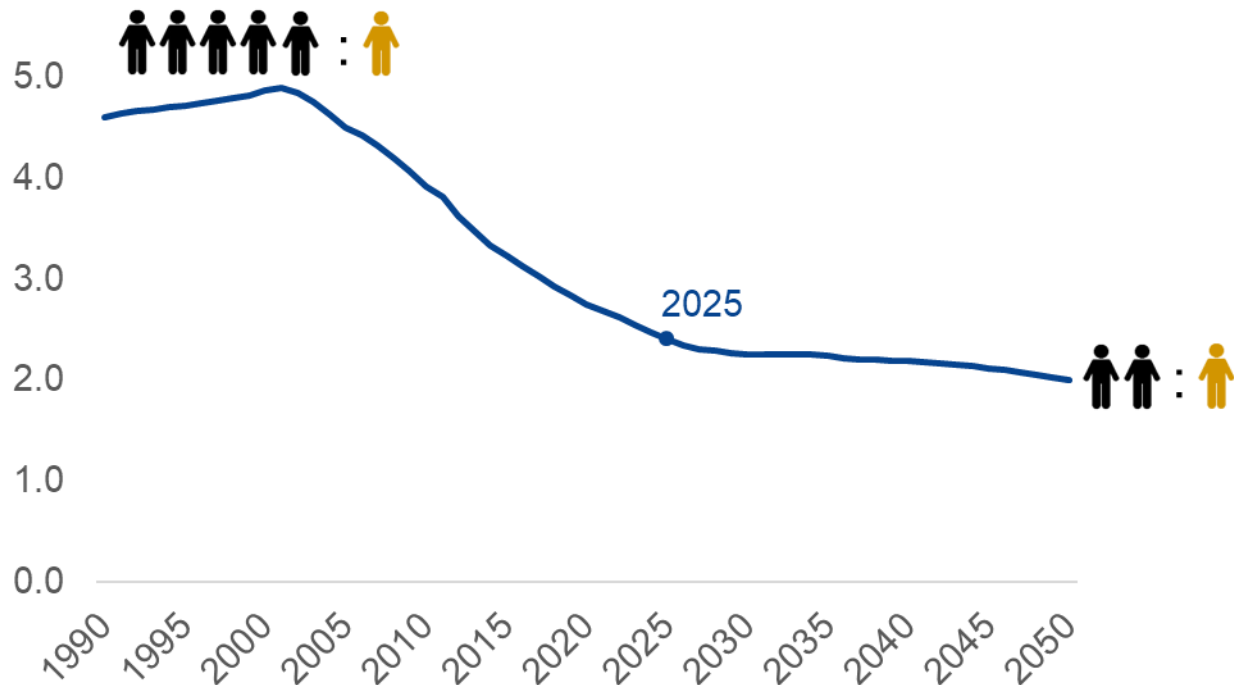
Economic impacts of aging will depend on several factors, including:

- Wealth, retirement saving, spending patterns
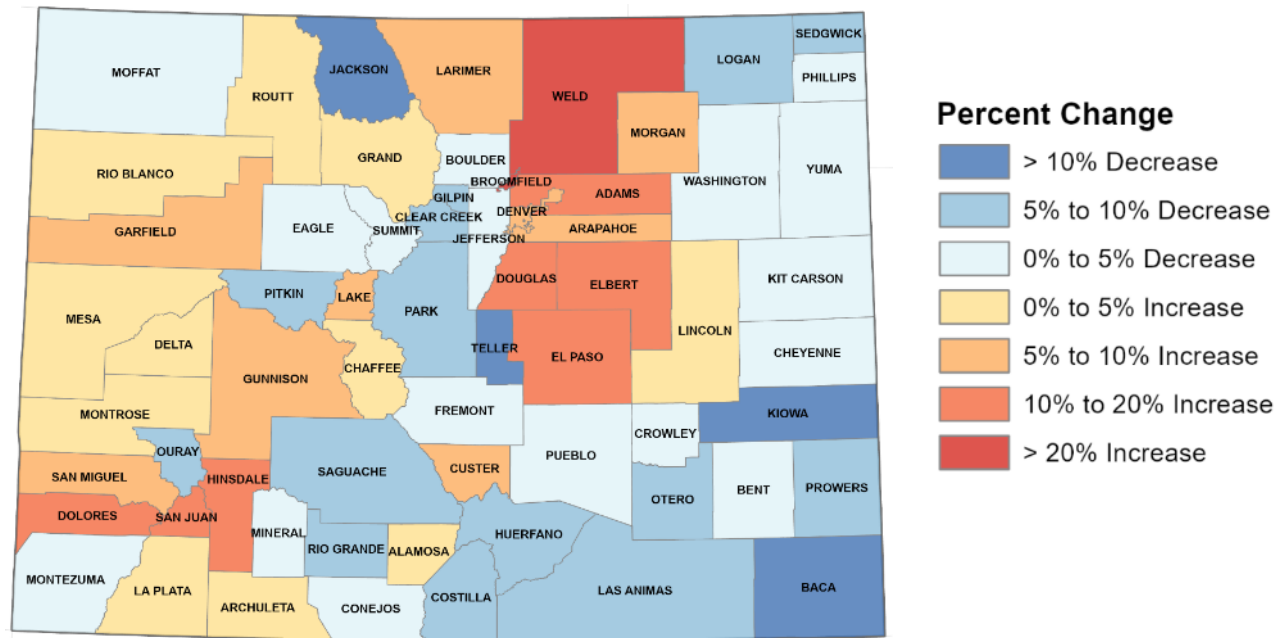- Labor force participation among those 65+

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.
https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/html/population.html

Declines in the traditional working age population expected in half of Colorado's counties

Change in 16 to 64 Year Old Population, 2020 to 2030

Percent Change

- > 10% Decrease
- 5% to 10% Decrease
- 0% to 5% Decrease
- 0% to 5% Increase
- 5% to 10% Increase
- 10% to 20% Increase
- > 20% Increase

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.
https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/html/population.html

Aging and the Economy

Housing & Wealth

- Slower growth among young adults moving forward (less demand for housing?)
- Retirees aging in place
  - 82% of those 65+ are homeowners
  - Living longer
  - Moving less
  - 42% of those 65+ live alone

  Pressure on the housing stock

  - More demand for rehab/re-model to age in place

- Housing transition and wealth transfer
  - Age 80-84 primary group aging into needing care or moving into care communities
  - What will happen to these homes?
  - Where will wealth be transferred?

Housing supply played catch up with demand in recent years

Annual Change in Colorado Population and Housing Units
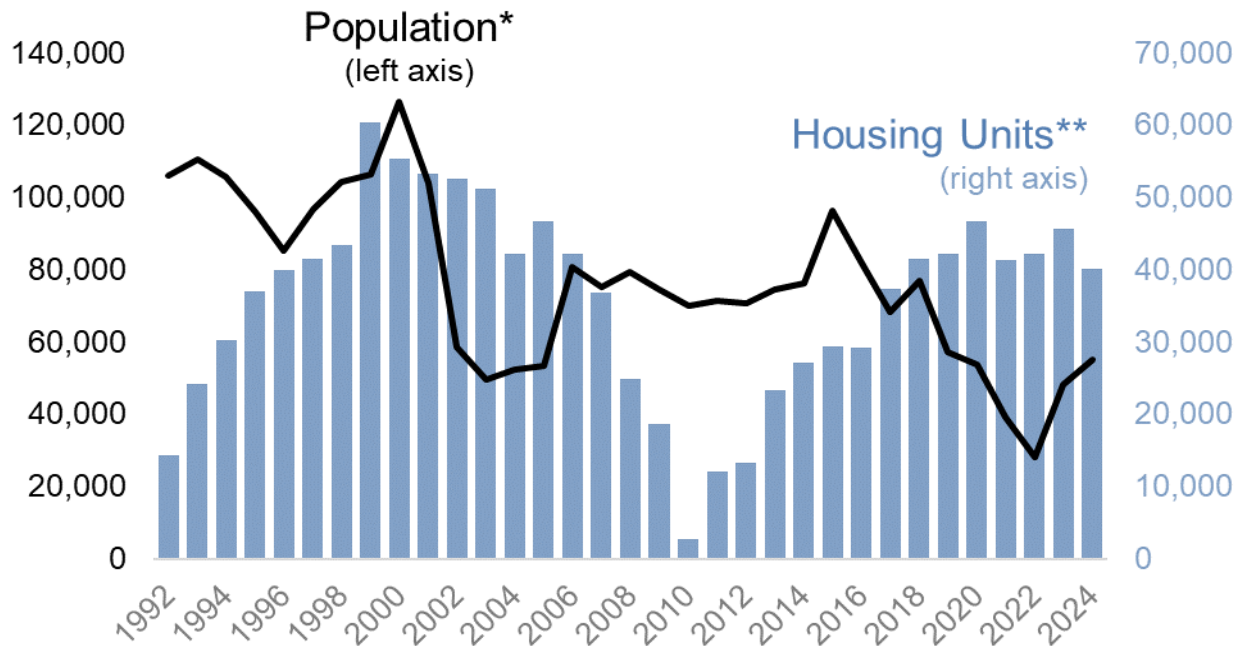
…yet construction activity has slowed considerably in 2024 and 2025

Source: Colorado State Demography Office preliminary 2024 population estimates.
*Population estimates reflect the household population, which excludes group quarters. On average in 2023 there were 2.45 persons per household. **Housing units are based on permit data provided by local governments and adjusted for the time to build.

SDO Statewide Housing Shortfall Estimates

Colorado Housing Shortfall (Housing Units)
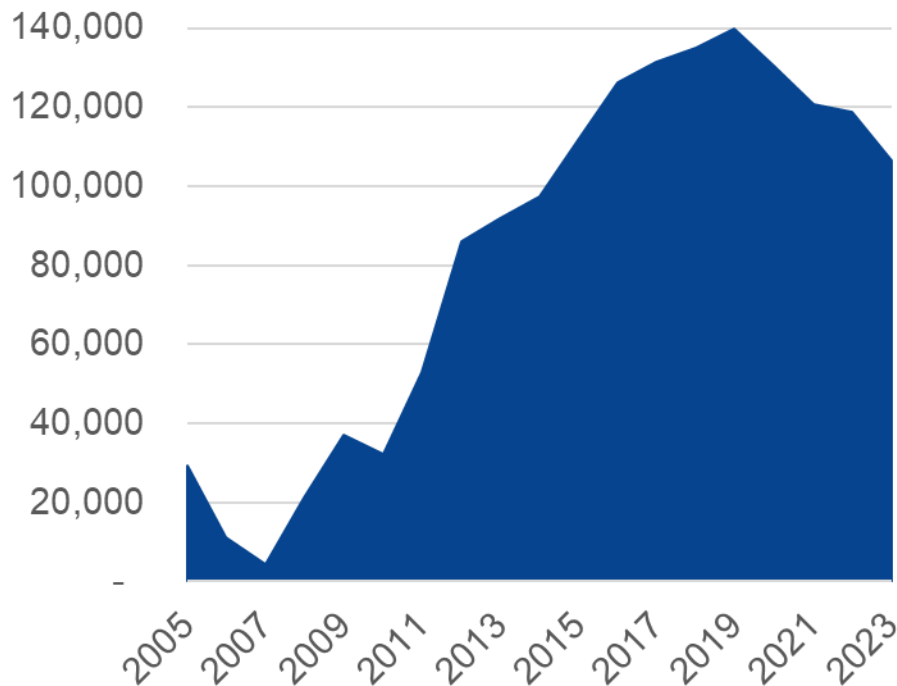
- 106,000 units short as of 2023

- Down 25% from the peak in 2019

- Yet, housing affordability issues have continued to worsen with time

- 34,100 additional units needed each year to hold the shortage constant and keep up with projected population growth over the next 10 years
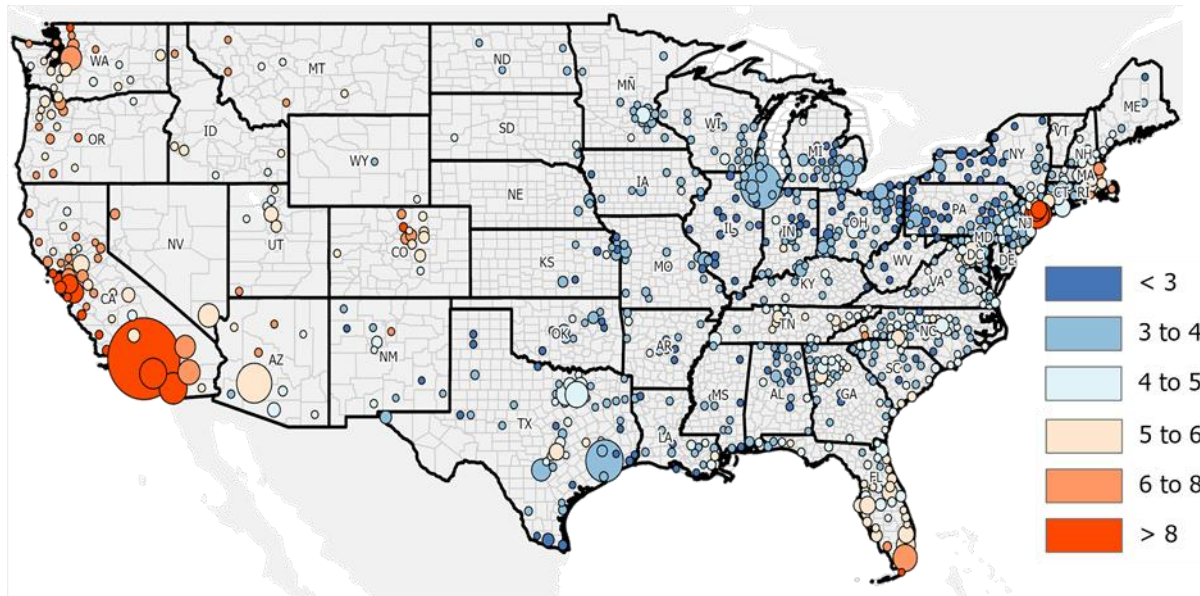
Incomes haven't kept up with housing costs

Years of median income needed to buy a median value home, 2023

Legend:
- < 3
- 3 to 4
- 4 to 5
- 5 to 6
- 6 to 8
- > 8

Dot size proportional to population.

Colorado ranks 6th among states* at 5.9 years, up from 3.5 in 2000

2023 County Rankings

#22 Boulder (8.0 years)
#47 Denver (6.7 years)
#57 Larimer (6.5 years)
#66 Jefferson (6.3 years)
#84 Broomfield (5.9 years)

The 75+ population is the fastest growing cohort

Colorado Population Aged 75+
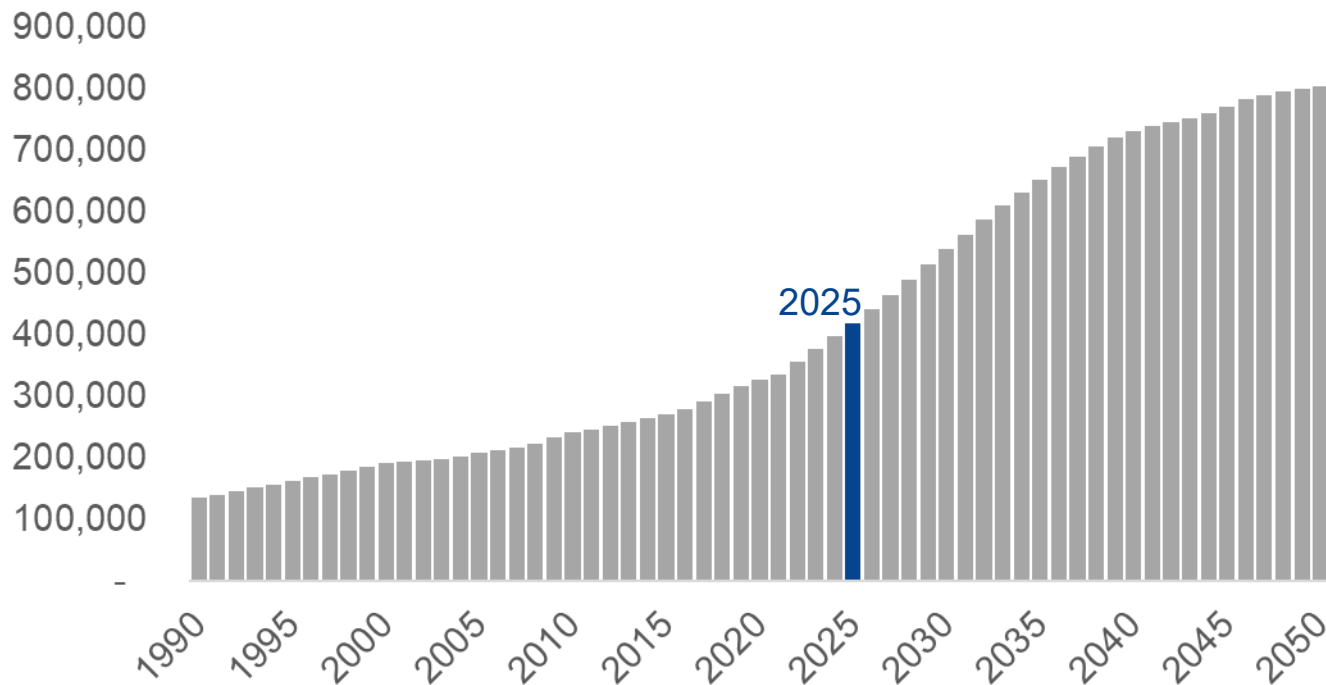
Health issues and need for assistance tend to increase at age 80+

230,000 new 75+ year olds expected over the next 10 years (56% increase)

Likely to contribute to state budgetary pressures through Medicaid expenditures

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.
https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/html/population.html

Change in the Age 75+ Population

Forecast Change in 75+ Year Old Population, 2020 to 2030

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.
https://gis.dola.colorado.gov/AgeMap/

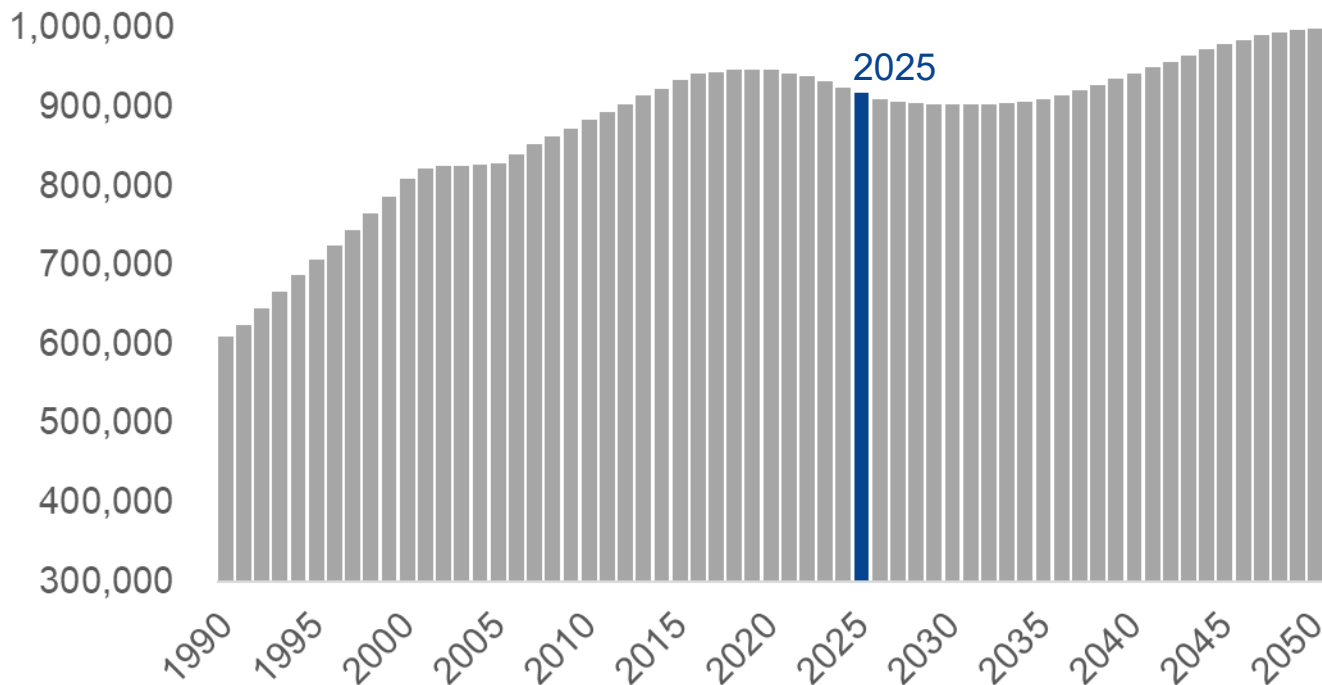# Colorado School Age Population

Population Aged 5 to 17

Long-term growth driven by net migration, which could be lower (or higher) than forecast.

Trends differ across the state, with declines expected to continue in several areas, strong growth in others
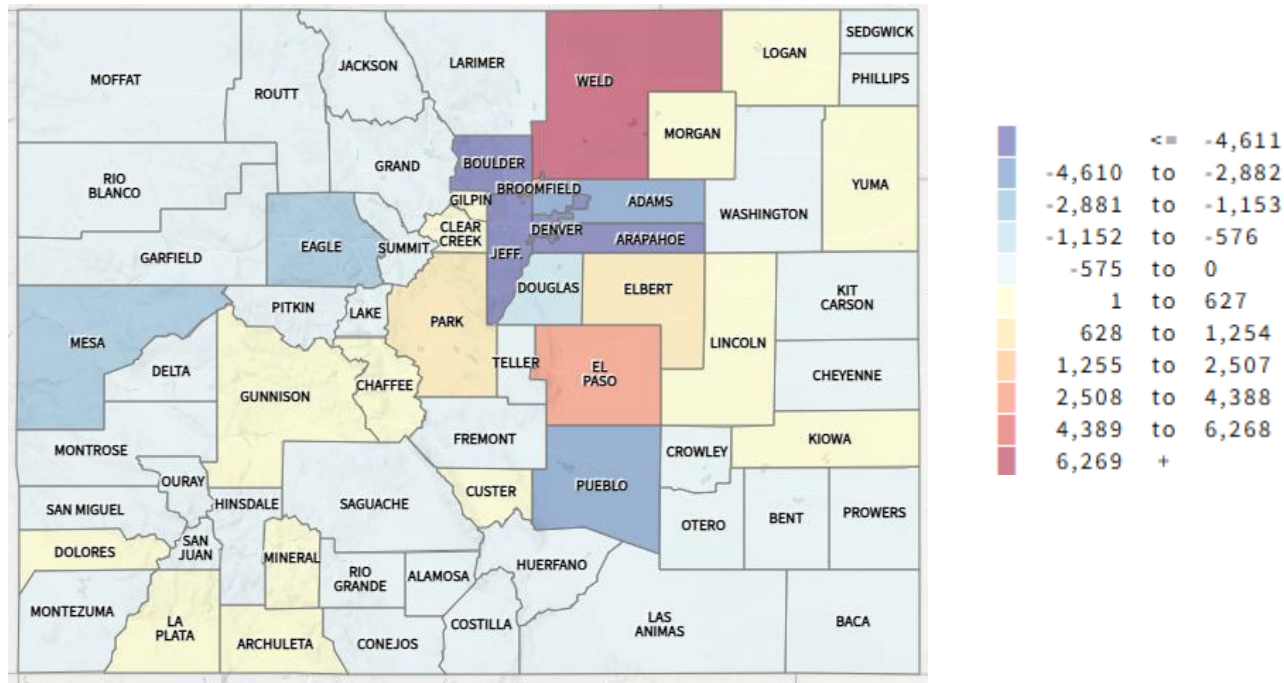
Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.
https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/html/population.html

Change in the School Age population

Forecast Change in Age 5 to 19 Population, 2020 to 2030

<=	-4,611	
-4,610	to	-2,882
-2,881	to	-1,153
-1,152	to	-576
-575	to	0
1	to	627
628	to	1,254
1,255	to	2,507
2,508	to	4,388
4,389	to	6,268
6,269	+	

Source: State Demography Office, vintage 2023 estimates and projections.
https://gis.dola.colorado.gov/AgeMap/

Risks to the Forecast

- National population growth
  - Immigration policy
  - Geopolitical events

- Push/pull relative to other states, counties
  - Housing affordability
  - Competition for labor
  - Natural disasters, water availability

- Economic activity
  - Net migration tied to the business cycle

- Remote/hybrid work: Less concentrated growth or return to work?

- Housing turnover: Will more Coloradan's move out freeing up supply?

- Automation & AI: Will AI impact labor markets?

Plan and invest with resiliency (many possible futures) in mind.

Strategic Growth *and* Strategic Aging

- How do we attract and retain talent?

- How do we meet the needs and wants of our aging populations?

- How can we better leverage the talents of our aging populations?

- How do we grow economies (or rethink economic growth) when our population or labor force shrinks?

- How might we better leverage technology?

There's no better time than now to plan for what our changing demographics will bring.

Questions?

Kate Watkins
kate.m.watkins@state.co.us

demography.dola.colorado.gov

Save the Date!
Demography Summit
November 7th