



“The Health and Retirement Study is the nation’s leading resource for data on the health and economic circumstances of Americans age 51 and older. I would like to thank the National Institutes of Health for its vision in supporting and conducting research on aging and on the selection of Michigan as the home base for this critical national study.”

—U.S. Representative John Dingell (D-Michigan)



The University of Michigan Health and Retirement Study is a longitudinal survey of a representative sample of Americans over the age of 50. Supported by the National Institute on Aging (part of the National Institutes of Health) and the Social Security Administration, HRS is designed to provide reliable data on the decisions, choices, and behaviors of people as they age and respond to changes in public policy, the economy, and health.

Need

Demographers have long anticipated the rapid aging of the population as the large Baby Boom generation reaches retirement. By 2030, when the last of the Boomers turns 65, the population over age 65 will nearly double. This dramatic change in our population means that there will be more retirees drawing benefits and fewer workers to help pay for programs like Social Security and Medicare, and more elderly parents with fewer children to help care for them. Good policy at the population level goes hand in hand with better science for understanding aging at the individual level. Anticipating these trends, the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the research community worked together to define the need for reliable data about aging that could help researchers and policymakers address these challenges.



Fulfillment

In 1990, an act of Congress directed the NIA to create a new study. The Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan was selected in scientific peer review to conduct the new Health and Retirement Study (HRS). The HRS launched data collection in 1992 and has re-interviewed the original sample of respondents every two years since then. By adding new cohorts and refreshing the sample, the HRS has grown to become the largest—with a current sample of over 26,000—and most representative longitudinal panel study of Americans over the age of 50. Through expanding its science into new areas of biology and psychology, it has become the most comprehensive study for understanding the lives of aging Americans.

