Colorado is experiencing unprecedented growth in its 65 and older population. This age group is expected to increase by 127 percent between 2013 and 2040. We often talk about older adults as one group, but in truth they differ in their health needs and expectations for aging.

We know that a 65 year old grew up in a very different world than an 85 year old. A 65-year-old Coloradan came of age in the era of Vietnam and the draft. An 85-year-old Coloradan grew up during the Great Depression and the prelude to World War II.

Understanding how seniors differ — both in the context of their past and their needs in the future — is important. City planners will have to adapt to changing housing and lifestyle desires of the Baby Boomers. Policymakers will need to understand that longer life expectancy means that we will need to care for — and pay for — a larger number of the elderly.

The health needs of today’s oldest adults give us a glimpse into the future. How will Colorado handle the high health needs of Baby Boomers when they hit 85? And what can we learn to prepare us for a Colorado when the first Millennials — born between 1980 and 2000 — turn 65?

The Baby Boomers
Born 1946 to 1964
They entered the world with a boom after World War II. Baby Boomers came of age amid great social change. They saw the civil rights movement unfold, experienced the draft during the Vietnam War and danced through the Summer of Love. Now, as they hit retirement age, Baby Boomers often opt to age at home rather than in a nursing facility.

The Silent Generation
Born 1928 to 1945
Many men of the Silent Generation missed World War II, but fought for their country during the Korean War. Women began thinking about working outside of the home, although it was a slow process. The Great Depression taught the Silent Generation the value of saving money and spending modestly. In retirement, many find themselves financially stable thanks to generous pensions, a perk that many employers no longer offer.

The Greatest Generation
Born before 1928
The Greatest Generation persevered through the Great Depression and fought for freedom during World War II. Others served on the home front, filling jobs to support the war effort. After the war, many went on to build industries and make great advances in science and social policy. Their experiences made members of this generation resilient and self-sufficient.
**Conclusion: Looking Forward**

While there are many questions about what aging will look like in the future, there is much to be learned from what we have seen so far. There has been a shift from nursing homes to community-based care, a trend that will require more affordable housing and services that support seniors who prefer to age in place.

How we deliver health care will continue to evolve. Technological advances such as telehealth and home monitoring apps are already on the scene. The link between technology and health will only strengthen as digital natives head into their retirement years.

All of us will be impacted by these trends and many others as we age or care for our loved ones. Now is the time to plan for the future needs of the aging population to ensure that Colorado is future-ready.

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