

POPULATION CHANGE ACROSS AGE GROUPS IN THE CMAP REGION

Population growth is both a condition and a consequence of economic prosperity. Thus, the Chicago region's residents are both the primary drivers of economic growth—and, in recent years, an indicator of slowing economic progress.

The human capital embodied in a well-educated, talented, and innovative resident pool provides significant economic value to the region's businesses. At the same time, residents choose to live here based on their perceptions of quality of life and economic opportunity within the region. The region cannot retain skilled residents without strong economic opportunities for those residents. Consequently, trends in population growth offer a barometer for the region's overall economic vitality.

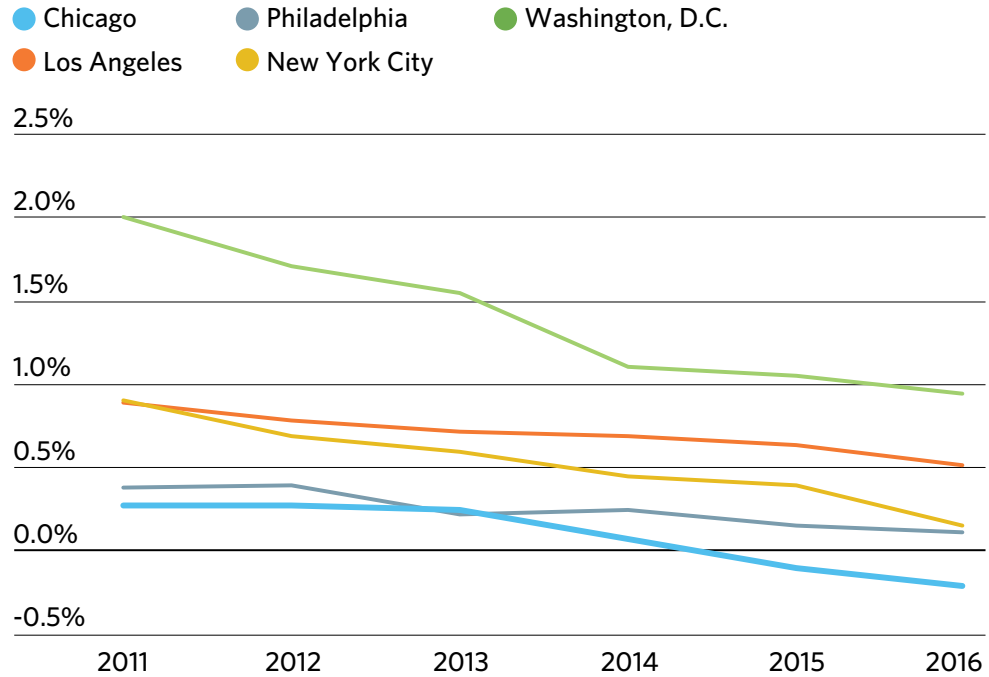
This Policy Update analyzes a recent U.S. Census data release on age composition and trends in population to understand their implications across the city of Chicago and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) seven counties. A subsequent Policy Update will analyze trends in the region's racial and ethnic diversity.

The most recent data indicate that the CMAP region continues to lag behind its peer regions in population growth. [The population decline first seen in 2015](#) persisted into 2016. An analysis of the region's age demographics reveals an aging population and a loss in children and adults ages 35-49 years, a sign that families are leaving the region.

Population decline in the CMAP region

The Census Bureau's estimates show that the Chicago region lost population for the second consecutive year, and the city of Chicago lost population for the third consecutive year. Extending the analysis to the region's peer metropolitan areas, including Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York City, and Washington, D.C., underscores the concern over this recent negative trend. The Chicago region is lagging significantly behind its metropolitan peers, which continue to experience population growth, [albeit with decreasing growth rates](#).

Population growth rates in the Chicago region and peer regions, 2011-16

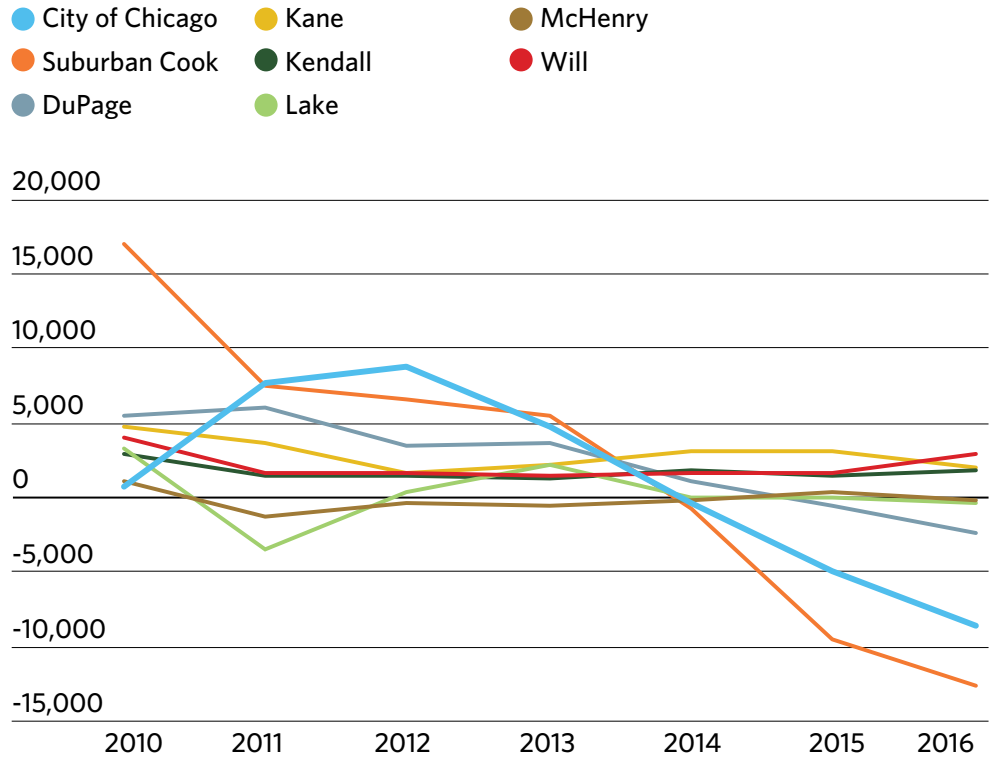


Source: U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program.

Further analysis shows that the region’s overall population loss stems from declining populations in the city of Chicago and four of the CMAP region’s seven counties: Cook, DuPage, Lake, and McHenry. Population declines in the city of Chicago relative to suburban Cook County indicate that the city’s share of population decline is approximately proportional to its share of the county’s population. The CMAP region’s remaining three counties—Kane, Kendall, and Will—continue to experience population growth.

Population change in the city of Chicago and CMAP counties (relative to prior year), 2010-16

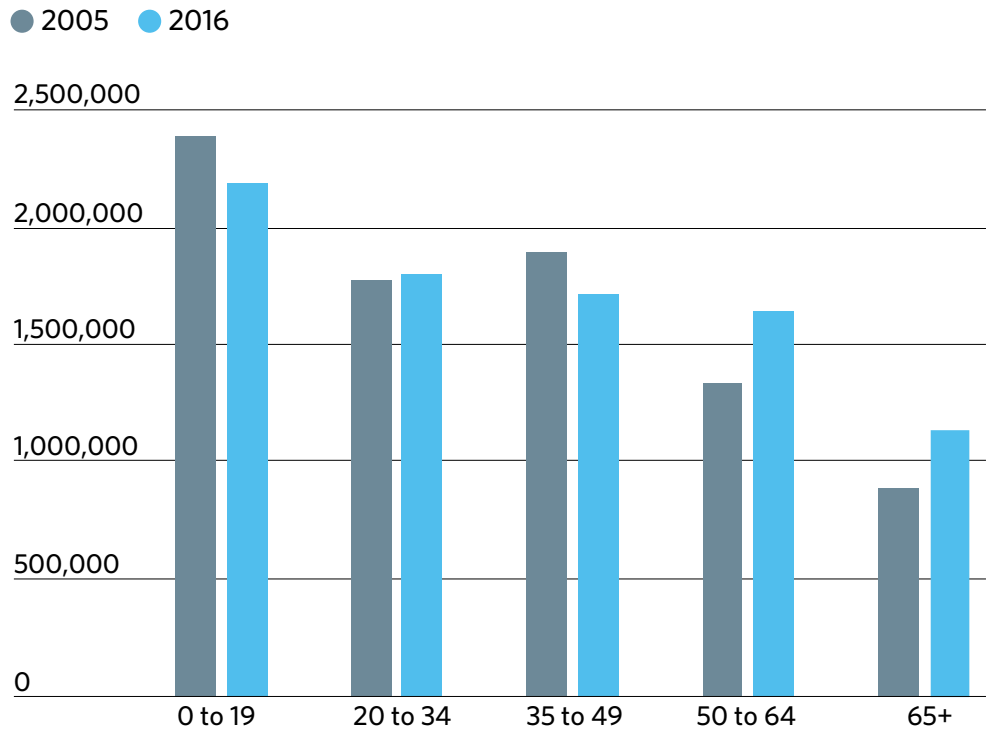
Source: U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program.



An aging population

This Census data points to declines in children (19 years and under) and adults ages 35-49 in the Chicago region. Some of this decline is the result of millennial and baby boomer residents aging into older cohorts, but the region is losing these age groups faster than aging alone can explain. At the same time, the 20-34-year-old age group has not kept pace with millennials growing into and expanding this cohort nationwide.

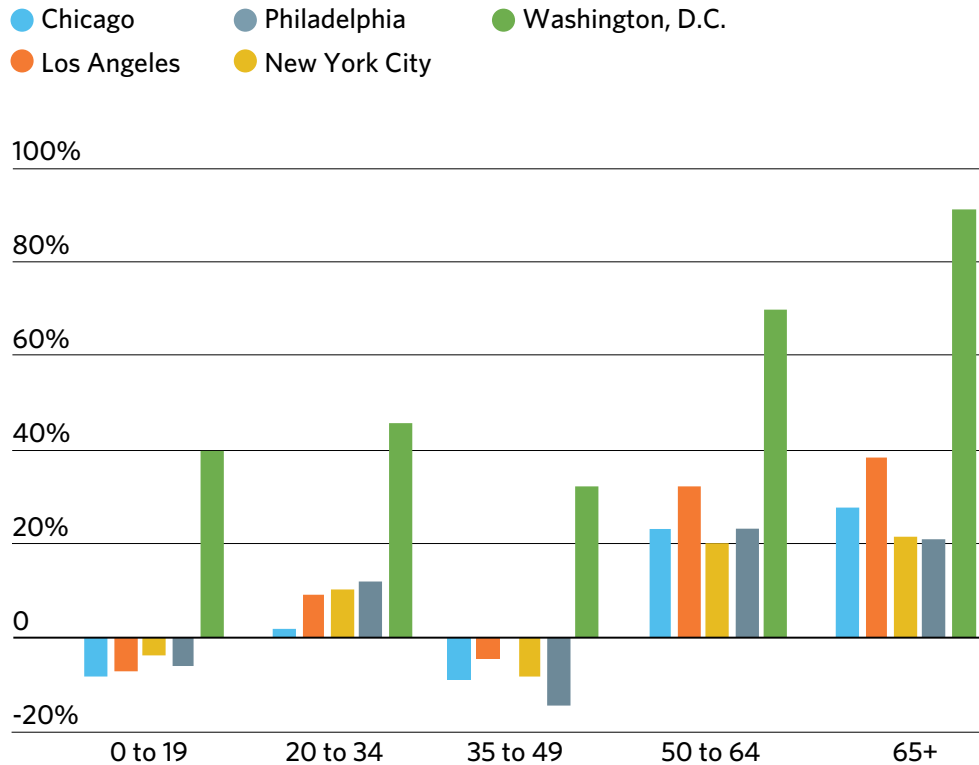
Total population by age cohort in the Chicago region, 2005 and 2016



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program.

Peer regions, with the exception of Washington, D.C., have also experienced declines in the same age groups. These negative trends also hold true across most areas in the CMAP region, including the city of Chicago and six of the seven counties. Kendall County is the lone exception, with a population that has increased by more than 50 percent during the last decade.

Population growth rates by age cohort in the Chicago region and select peer regions between 2005 and 2016



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program.

Conversely, population totals by age cohort in the CMAP region reveal a small increase in the number of younger adult residents, or those in the 20-34 range. This group represents the majority of millennials in the CMAP region in 2015. Due to the size of this generation, the increase in this age group is pervasive across peer regions and across six of the seven counties in the Chicago region. Gains are not consistent, however. A decrease in this age cohort occurred in suburban Cook, offset by an increase of 82,000 in the city. Overall, growth in this age group within the CMAP region is behind our peers and the nation.

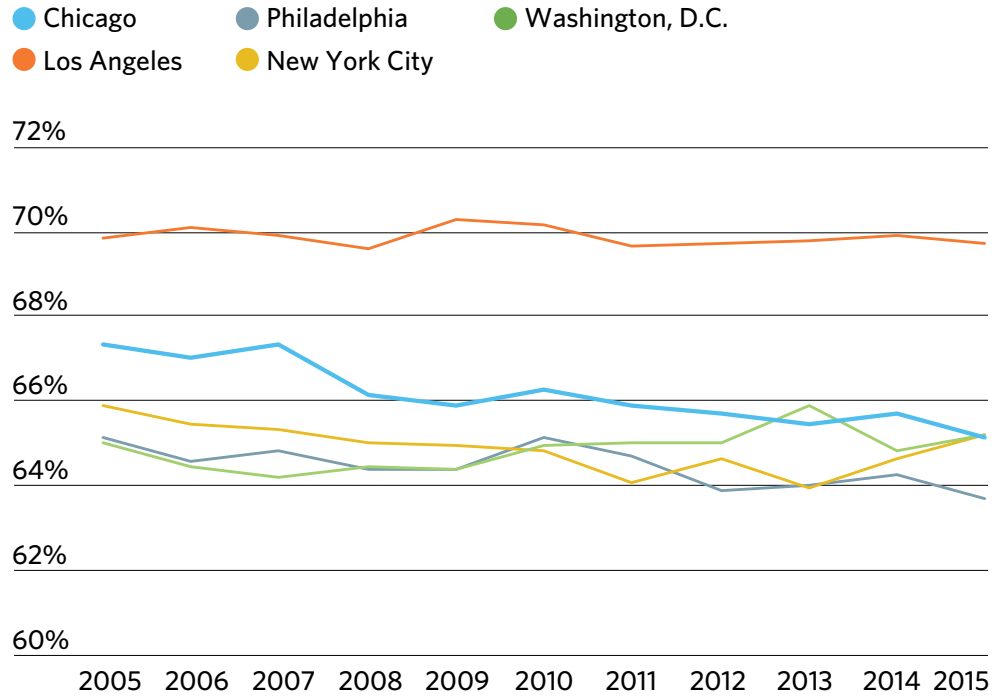
Consistent with national aging trends, the data also reveal that the Chicago region’s population is aging. Significant increases in older cohorts (50+ years) occurred every year since 2005, a trend witnessed in peer regions and other areas across the country. This is largely due to the baby boomer generation, whose members began turning 65 in 2011. Due to these cumulative shifts, people age 50 and older now constitute a larger share of metropolitan Chicago’s total population, consequently driving an aging regional population.

Loss of families from the Chicago region

While the decline in children (19 years and under) may be linked to [nationally decreasing birth rates](#) and to the overall smaller size of Generation X and their subsequent families, the data indicate that both children and adults in the 35-49 age group are leaving the region. Declines in these two particular age groups suggest changes in family trends. American Community Survey data on families reveal a concerning finding: Despite an increase in the number of households in the region during the last 10 years, the number of families in the region has decreased during the same time.

With later marriages, lower birth rates, and an aging population, some slowdown in the growth of families is to be expected. A decreasing proportion of the region's households are family households, a trend seen in all peer regions except Washington, D.C. As residents delay marriage, for example, regions witness an increase in total households but a decrease in family households. While this holds true in most select peer regions, the Chicago region's share of family households is declining at a faster relative rate.

Share of households that are family households in the Chicago region and select peer regions, 2005-15



Source: American Community Survey 1-year estimates, 2005-15.

While the Chicago region mirrors peer regions with respect to age and family households trends, Chicago alone is losing families. For example, despite a decrease in its share of family households, the Los Angeles region still added more than 200,000 families. Additionally, the New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., metropolitan regions also saw an increase in families since 2005. The decline in families in the Chicago region, though small in number, reflects that the region has not recovered from its recessionary population loss. In contrast, by 2015, all other select peer regions had fully recovered.

Where many select peer regions are experiencing a rise in family households and a decline in the share of single-person households, the opposite is true in the Chicago region. These differences suggest that metropolitan Chicago may be less attractive to families relative to its peers. This may be due to overall economic conditions, quality of life, and cost of living, among other issues.

The region's loss of families is focused within Cook County, where the city of Chicago lost more than 28,000 families since 2005 and suburban Cook County lost 16,000. In contrast to the loss of families in the city and suburban Cook, the remaining six counties in the Chicago region added families.

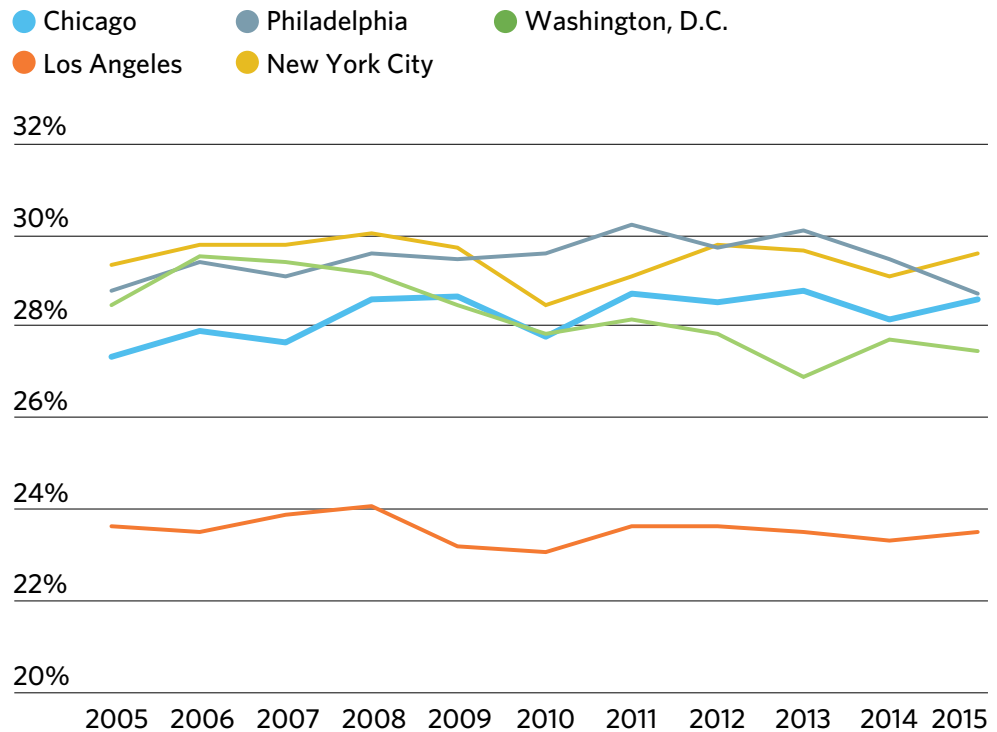
Growth in single-person households in the CMAP region

The region is experiencing an increase in single-person households, and there are many potential reasons for this trend. Metropolitan Chicago may be experiencing the effects of delayed marriage and an aging population more strongly than its peers, attracting more single residents, or simply retaining more single-person households. As a result, the region has added single-person households in four of the last five years, including in 2015 during overall population losses. The region has added single-person households at two-and-a-half times the rate of overall household growth, more than any peers. In particular, the region has seen a significant increase in single-person households in which the householder is 65 years or older, suggesting strong aging effects. Non-family households with two or more people account for just six percent of the region's households, but have also increased substantially since 2005, and in four of the last five years.

The Chicago region is experiencing faster growth in single-person households relative to select peer regions. Though the Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., regions added single-person households, they also experienced declines in the share of single-person households. In contrast, Chicago's share of single-person households increased by two percentage points.

Share of single-person households in the Chicago region and select peer regions, 2005-15

Source: American Community Survey 1-year estimates, 2005-15.



Looking ahead

Population trends are closely related to changes in economic opportunity. Reversing population decline in the CMAP region will require fostering strong economic opportunities that meet the changing needs and preferences of current and prospective residents. Strengthening the region’s ability to retain and attract residents will positively contribute to the region’s labor force which, in turn, promotes long-term economic growth.

The region’s ability to compete in the global economy is only as strong as its labor force, a topic CMAP explored in its [economic indicators](#) and [regional economic clusters](#) work. This and previous analyses highlight the need for regional collaboration, such as on workforce development initiatives that produce an educated labor force able to meet the needs of a changing economy. Regional stakeholders must continue to work together to foster the region’s largest and growing economic clusters. Such cooperative measures will help to create strong economic opportunities that are accessible to all residents, ultimately attracting population growth.

In the development of ON TO 2050, CMAP is exploring shifts in regional demographic and economic trends. An [economic clusters snapshot](#) highlights emerging regional economic challenges and opportunities. A [demographics snapshot](#) tracks regional trends in natural growth, domestic and international migration, and the region’s racial and ethnic composition.

312-454-0400
info@cmap.illinois.gov
www.cmap.illinois.gov

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