

Delaware's Process for Projecting Demographic and Population Estimates—Overview, Evolution, and the Future Role of the Delaware Population Consortium

OVERVIEW

This policy brief was developed by IPA as part of its partnership with and funding from the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) Planning Division. Information provided is intended to inform key stakeholders—including state agency staff, local government leaders, and community organizations in Delaware—about the history, evolution, and applications of the Delaware Population Consortium work and annual projections. In addition to its infrastructure and transportation policy team, IPA recognizes contributions to the document made by our DelDOT partners, the University of Delaware's Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research (CADSR), the Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination (OSPC), and others interviewed as part of IPA's fiscal year 2022 infrastructure work plan.

IPA and its acknowledged partners look forward to facilitating additional discussions aimed at addressing the research considerations posed at the end of this brief and the role of DPC in informing future education, research, and analysis relevant to emerging policy issues in Delaware.

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HISTORY OF THE DELAWARE POPULATION CONSORTIUM

Creation

The Delaware Population Consortium (DPC) was formed in 1975 to help standardize statewide population projections. Prior to its formation, informal estimates were developed for specific projects on ad hoc bases. The original members of the DPC included New Castle, Kent, and Sussex Counties, the City of Newark, the City of Wilmington, the Wilmington Area Planning Council (WILMAPCO), and the 208 Aerated Waste Treatment Management Program.

Research and Staff Support

Since the DPC's inception, research and staff support has been provided through the Joseph R. Biden, Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration's Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research (CADSR) at the University of Delaware. While the formation of a formal staffing and budgetary structure has been limited, CADSR faculty and staff crafted the initial population projections and have provided critical technological and methodological assistance over the past four decades. Some components of this work are conducted through a yearly contractual agreement between CADSR and the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT). This includes an annual release of Delaware and county-specific projections based on updated U.S. Census data. In 2017, municipal projections were added to the scope of work.

Codification

The DPC was formally codified into Delaware state law through Senate Bill 7 of the 150th General Assembly, which was signed by Governor Carney on May 14, 2019, and became effective in November 2019.¹ The *2020 Report on State Planning Issues*,² prepared by the Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues, described the value of DPC, the data it provides, and the purpose of Senate Bill 7:

The population projections produced by the Delaware Population Consortium (DPC) are indispensable to many planning and forecasting processes throughout the state... This legislation [SB7] formalizes the DPC, identifies its membership and work products, and requires that all counties, municipalities, school districts, and state agencies use the DPC projections for planning and policy purposes... Having one authoritative set of demographic and population projections for Delaware is vital to efficient and effective land use planning, economic development, school planning, and other state functions. This legislation [SB7] is an important implementation measure from Governor Carney's Government Efficiency and Accountability Review (GEAR) initiative. It will ensure that all state, county, and local agencies are using one mutually agreed upon set of population projections and as such encourage efficiency and transparency in government.

Now formalized in Title 29, Chapter 91, Subchapter V of the Delaware Code, the law requires state agencies, counties, municipalities, and school districts to use the consortium's population projections for planning and policy purposes.³ The state law also notes the DPC may create seasonal population projections for resort areas and develop population projections at other scales, for example in planning districts and traffic analysis zones.

DPC membership is now set by state law to include representatives from the Office of State Planning Coordination (OSPC); New Castle, Kent, and Sussex County governments; the state's metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs); incorporated municipalities with populations over 20,000 residents; the Delaware Departments of Labor, Education, Transportation, Health and Social Services, and Safety and Homeland Security; Delaware State Housing Authority; the Delaware League of Local Governments; and the Sussex County Association of Towns. Outside of the set voting membership, other interested parties may participate in the DPC's meetings as non-voting members.

OBJECTIVES, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES

Key Objectives

The primary objectives of the DPC are as follows:

- Develop a unified set of population projections for statewide utilization
- Develop a unified set of population projections spanning 30 years
- Use and refine a singular methodology for the population projections
- Develop and release annual population projections for the state, the three counties, and each incorporated municipality

Bylaws⁴

Elections and Terms of Officers

For the first year of operation, three officers were elected from within the DPC's membership: the chair, the vice-chair, and the secretary. In the years following this initial year of operation, the vice-chair has automatically taken the position of chair, and elections are held for a new vice-chair and secretary. These officers each serve for one calendar year, beginning with the meeting during which they are elected and concluding with the meeting during which the next set of officers are elected. Officers need a simple majority to win the election, and they are eligible to be elected more than once. However, the same individual or organization is ineligible to hold more than one of these elected positions during the same calendar year.

Powers and Duties of Officers

The chair is tasked with presiding over meetings and is responsible for taking on other duties that may arise. The chair is the sole member of the DPC with the ability to authorize funds. The vice-chair takes the position of chair in the absence of the elected individual. The secretary is responsible for developing meeting minutes and maintaining records. These records include DPC's membership, participation, and financial records.

Procedures Governing Meetings

All DPC meetings are open to the general public. Annual meeting schedules, agenda, and additional resources are posted on the OSPC website.⁵

METHODOLOGY AND EXAMPLES OF PROMINENT USE

The methodology used by CADSR to develop DPC projections is based on a formula:

Births - Deaths + Net Migration

As needed, CADSR, through its expertise and experience, relies on additional demographic data and economic analysis.

Per Delaware's statute, county and local governments use DPC projections as part of their comprehensive planning process. This process also requires a section that outlines the area's position on population and housing growth. Other projections might be approved to include for informational purposes, and the DPC Bylaws now have a formal process for local governments and others to appeal the draft projections.⁶

Analytical interpretation and presentation of projections can offer important demographic and economic characteristics about Delaware's communities now and into the future. These community characteristics can inform policy makers, agency leaders, and local stakeholders about the potential needs and issues impacting residents. These issues include transportation planning, new school construction, and services for the increasing older adult population in Delaware.

Transportation Planning

DelDOT, WILMAPCO, and the Dover/Kent County MPO rely on DPC projections to identify populations and projected population growth in traffic analysis zones, which inform statewide traffic modeling and identify roadway capacities. This projected capacity is then used as a primary input for the statewide and regional travel demand model that

measures the need for expanding the transportation network capacity. As a result, the projections have a major impact on the state's transportation planning and analysis used to determine future demand on roadways and travel times. This has a significant impact on the prioritization, timing, and programming of major statewide transportation infrastructure projects. These transportation improvement projects are ultimately evaluated, planned, and approved through the DelDOT Capital Transportation Program, which is a public process and is overseen by the State Council on Transportation (COT).

Long-term migration trends, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on remote work and commuting trends, are still unknown. While commutes to offices and the use of public transit have both declined significantly since March 2020, it is still far too early to understand how these trends will play out in the long term. However, as commuter patterns evolve and post pandemic impacts are realized, DPC projections can support longer-term transportation planning, particularly among higher capacity roadways such as Interstate 95 and Route 1.

School Construction

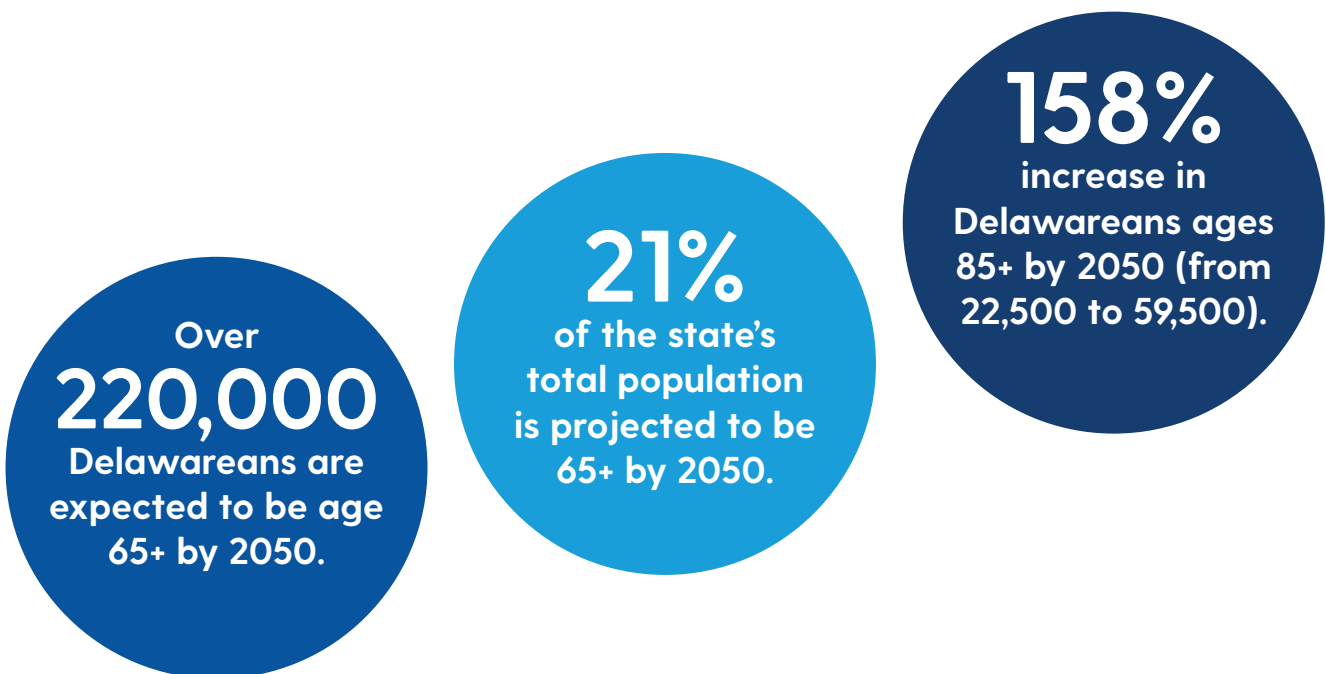
Another prominent usage is by the Department of Education (DOE) in planning for school capacity and the need to build new facilities. DOE utilizes the population projections approved by the DPC to support formula-based calculations of space required per student for different activities and grade levels. DOE uses these analyses to inform the bond bill and state budget to justify new school construction.

Increasing Older Adult Population

As indicated in Figure 1, anticipated increases in the share of the state's 65 and older population (65+) is a primary trend likely to influence policy in Delaware over the coming decades. As DPC projections illustrate, the percentage of individuals 65 and older is expected to steadily increase between now and 2050, and presents opportunities for an expanded statewide use of DPC data. To best prepare for the needs and services associated with aging, agencies that serve older adults and their families can better understand projected growth and its potential impact in specific areas of the state.

As Delaware's older adult population grows, state

Figure 1. 2050 Population Projections for Delaware's Older Adult Population



and local policymakers and social service providers will experience new and diverse demands for senior services and programs. This includes community-based programs, such as senior centers, and long-term care services. DPC projections help determine state funding allocations to senior centers, and the Delaware Health Resources Board relies on the projections to identify emerging trends and needs for Delaware's long-term care services. These reports are based on DPC information and projections of the state's older adult populations. As the state's population aged 85 and older grows, additional opportunities to support long-term needs and demands will likely be presented. Using both statewide and jurisdictional DPC projections help identify specific needs and trends. For example, in 2020, the percentage of the state's 85 and older population was approximately 22,500, or 2.3 percent. By 2050, that percentage is likely to increase to over 5 percent of the state's total population.

Other state agencies and groups may find value in DPC projections to understand the types of services and benefits that will best support residents as they age. This includes community-based resources, housing options, and long-term care facilities.

Migration Patterns in Southern Delaware

The combination of new housing developments and rental properties paired with the number of retirees moving to Sussex County for full-time residency makes future growth more difficult to project.

Over the past 20 years, new home development has drastically increased, and identifying the percentage of new homes that are vacation/seasonal homes—as opposed to full-time residences—has become more challenging. Additionally, short-term rentals, vacation rentals by owner, and other seasonal-rental options are still very prevalent in the area. Many new houses in newly built, single-family developments are primarily used as rental properties. Over the next few decades, these trends may have significant implications for the housing and health-services industries in Sussex County.

While DPC projections are likely used or referenced by other organizations in Delaware, the full range of usage is not yet known. Further research is needed to better identify those that rely on the information and for what purposes. To help more agencies understand how the projections can guide state and local policy, greater education and awareness may be helpful.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND ANALYSIS

Over the years, DPC projections have been increasingly recognized as a reliable and important source among Delaware public agencies. While formally codified into state law, the full range of projection utilization requires additional research and investigation. In addition to helping support county and municipal comprehensive plans and state agency planning and infrastructure investment efforts, DPC's projections could be used to further understand the unique characteristics and needs of Delaware's small towns and communities.

Specific questions and future research considerations for state leaders, DPC affiliates, and current user groups include:

- What other groups use or reference DPC projections?
- What is missing from the current DPC framework?
- What are other examples of future utilization?
- Are there specific policy areas, geographies, and/or populations that should be featured through additional, near-term research and analysis?
- What priority is given to DPC projections in terms of state funding, etc.?
- What are the longer-term research/staffing and funding structures needed to sustain and expand upon DPC's process and methodological framework?
- What additional partnership opportunities or models could be examined (e.g., other states, universities)?

Opportunities to educate governmental entities beyond those that currently rely upon DPC projections could help expand the understanding and significance of the information among other groups. Additionally, the translation of data and information into detailed analyses and broader contexts can frame policy implications and potential impacts of evolving demographic trends.

A formal research/staff and budgetary structure may be an important factor in maintaining the institutional knowledge, methodology, and analysis to continue offering objective information.

END NOTES

1. 150th Delaware General Assembly. (2019, May 14.) *Senate Bill 7*. <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail/27085>
2. Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues. (2020, October). *2020 Report on State Planning Issues*. <https://stateplanning.delaware.gov/publications/documents/2020-annual-report.pdf>
3. Del. Code tit. 29 § 9152 (2019). <https://delcode.delaware.gov/title29/c091/sc05/index.html>
4. Delaware Population Consortium. (2019, October 31). *Bylaws of the Delaware Population Consortium*. <https://stateplanning.delaware.gov/demography/documents/dpc/dpc-by-laws.pdf?ver=0211>
5. Office of State Planning Coordination. *The Delaware Population Consortium meetings*. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from <https://stateplanning.delaware.gov/demography/dpc-meetings.shtml>
6. Delaware Population Consortium. (2019, October 31). *Bylaws of the Delaware Population Consortium*. <https://stateplanning.delaware.gov/demography/documents/dpc/dpc-by-laws.pdf?ver=0211>

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