

December
2025

State of Dorset Older People



The population of Dorset, like the rest of the UK, is ageing. This trend is more pronounced in Dorset due to its larger older population and declining birth rate. The median age in Dorset is now 52, an increase of 5 years since 2011. In comparison, the median age for England and Wales is 40, up by one year.¹

Typically, 'Older People' refers to those who are no longer of working age, traditionally 65 and older. However, with increased life expectancy, more people are either having to work or choosing to work beyond the traditional retirement age.

Big Numbers Box

34,926

Population of 80+
year olds in 2024

Aged 65+
in Dorset 31%

In England
& Wales 19%

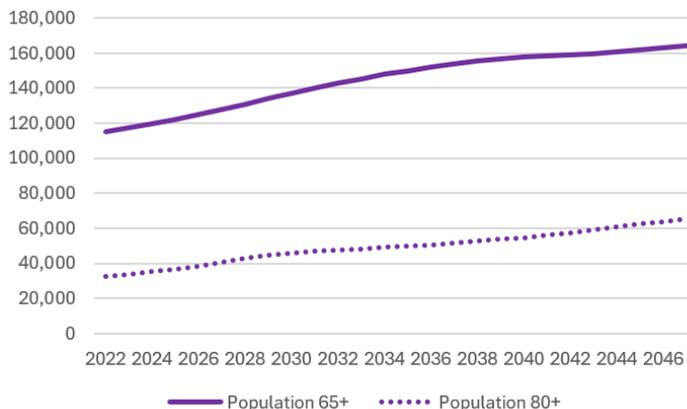
2.2% pa
Growth in those
aged 65+ over
next decade

81 years
Life expectancy males

85 years
Life expectancy females

Box 1: Population

Population projection of older people



The population 65+ is projected to grow by 22% between 2025 and 2035 and is projected to increase by 32% by 2045.

The population aged 80 and older is expected to grow by 36% from 2025 to 2035, and by 71% by 2045.²



Nationwide migration of older people is driven by movement out of urban areas to rural and coastal areas. Net migration figures in Dorset are highest for the 60-64 yr old age group³.

The Old Age Dependency Ratio (OADR) measures the number of people over 65 per 1,000 people aged 16 to 64. In England and Wales, the OADR is 297, while in Dorset, it is 537¹.



Nationally, 54% of household growth between 2023 and 2033 will be in homes where the main householder is aged 75 or over. In Dorset, this figure is 87%.

The population of those 75+ living in care homes or nursing homes is projected to grow by 28% in Dorset, slightly above the average for England of 26%⁴.

Box 2: Life expectancy & work

Life expectancy has been increasing at a slower rate in recent years. People aged 65 in Dorset can expect to live for a further 22.5 years for women and 19.8 years for men.⁵

People are living longer and healthier lives. In Dorset, healthy life expectancy at 65 is above average. Women can expect 12.8 more years in good/fairly good health, and men 11.6 years. This compares to 11.3 and 10.5 years respectively for England.⁶

The life expectancy gap between Dorset's most and least deprived areas is 4.9 years for males and 3.2 years for females.⁷ This has decreased since 2020, by two years for females and males.

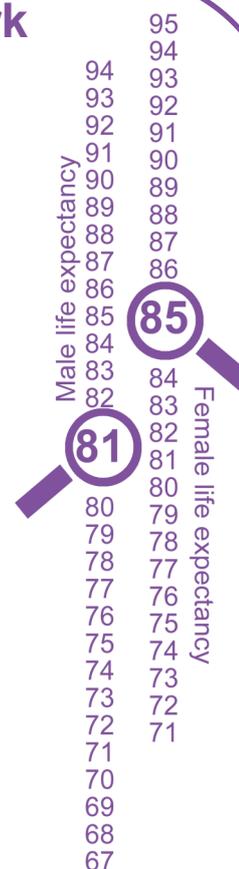


In Dorset, around 12,000 people aged 65+ are economically active and employed. This represents nearly 11% of this age group, indicating later retirement trends.

Additionally, 7% of the economically active population in Dorset are 65 or older, compared to 4% in England and Wales. This highlights a growing reliance on older individuals within the workforce.⁸



According to Census 2021, 32% of the 35,500 unpaid carers were aged 65 and over compared to 23% for England & Wales. As the population ages, there will be increased need for informal care.



Box 3: Living well⁹

- As the population ages in Dorset, older people are more likely to need adaptations to enable them to live independently for longer. With the increase in the cost of living over the past five years, the cost of raw materials and labour has also increased, meaning that alterations and additions to properties are becoming more expensive.
- Dorset's older people account for almost one third of its population. Levels of internal net migration are highest in older age groups, particularly those aged 55 to 69 years, while levels of net out migration are particularly high for 18 to 29 year olds. This means there will be fewer people to work in the economy and care for our ageing population.
- As the population ages and more older people experience disabilities and health issues, the need for specialist housing will increase. It's estimated that 20% of all housing will need to be for older people. By 2038, there will be a projected shortfall of 2,800 specialist bedspaces in the community¹⁰.

Sources

1. 2024 Mid-year estimates, Office for National Statistics
2. 2022-ONS based trend population projections
3. 2021 MYE Internal Migration Estimates, ONS
4. 2018 based Household Projections, ONS
5. Life expectancy at 65 (3 year range 2020-2022), ONS /PH
6. Healthy Life Expectancy (2018-20), ONS/PH
7. Office for Health Improvement and disparity (2023), Public Health England
8. Census 2021
9. Dorset and BCP Local Housing Needs Assessment, 2021
10. Ibid.