

California population growth estimated at 1% a year

Micaela Massimino, Sacramento Bee, 11-24-09

When the Legislative Analyst's Office issued its report last week on California's fiscal outlook, it also forecast how the state's population will change between now and 2015.

That's because the state's demographics affect how much revenue California collects as well as how much it spends on education, health, social services, corrections and other areas.

The state's population will grow by at least 1 percent a year, according to the LAO, even with the recession and high housing prices. That growth promises to follow long-term trends in births, deaths and migration.

Women are waiting longer to have children, so the number of K-12 students isn't expected to grow much until 2013. But births are expected to greatly outnumber deaths.

Because people are living longer, the number of residents 65 and older is expected to jump more than 4 percent a year.

Then there's the question of migration.

According to the state Department of Finance, California has been losing residents to other states, though not at the same clip as in the early 1990s. The LAO expects the state to lose population to other states through 2015, but the rate should slow as the economy improves.

California is also expected to continue to gain far more foreign immigrants than it loses, but they will account for a declining share of the state's population growth through 2015.

The LAO report issues this caveat: Population estimates are just estimates.

It notes that the state Department of Finance and the U.S. Census Bureau come up with significantly different numbers for net migration out of California and that those numbers contribute to very different estimates for how many people are living in the state.

That's because the Finance Department counts people who change where they live and apply for new driver's licenses in another state. Meanwhile, the Census Bureau has been tracking the addresses reported on federal income tax returns from 2005 through 2007.

For the record, the Finance Department estimates the state's 2008 population at 38.1 million. The Census Bureau puts it at 36.8 million.

In the late 1990s, the state's population estimate was also higher than the bureau's. According to the 2000 census count, the actual number turned out to be in the middle.