Metropolitan Policy Program
at BROOKINGS

CONTACT: Rachel Harvey, 202-797-6073, rharvey@brookings.edu
                      John Fairbanks, 202-797-6087, jfairbanks@brookings.edu

America Pulls Apart by Age
Brookings analysis of new Census data shows fast-growing age divide in U.S. metros

Washington, D.C. – Baby boomers have crossed the "generation gap" and are now, along with older Americans, the majority of the nation's voting age population, according to new analysis by the Brookings Institution, "The Uneven Aging and 'Younging' of America: State and Metropolitan Trends in the 2010 Census."

However, changing demographics are catching up with the generation that has commanded so much attention since it came of age in the late 1960s.

"America is beginning to show its age as the baby boomers advance toward full-fledged senior-hood," said William H. Frey, Senior Fellow with the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program. "Meanwhile we're seeing an increasing generation gap as some areas are experiencing 'younging' with great gains in their younger populations."

The Brookings analysis highlights a growing divide between aging populations in some metros and a fast growing younger population in other metros. In addition to this divide across metros, the population within metros is aging at a more rapid pace in suburbs than in cities. The suburban stereotype of young families with children is now less true as the baby boomers who resided in suburbs as children are now "aging in place" in these same communities.

The new report by the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program examines 2010 Census data evaluating national patterns of age-related growth and decline, and state and metropolitan variations in older and younger population shifts. Among the report's findings:

- **Due to baby boomers "aging in place," the population age 45 and over grew 18 times as fast as the population under age 45 between 2000 and 2010.** All states and metropolitan areas are showing noticeable growth in their older and "advanced middle age" populations which, for the first time, comprise a majority of the nation's voting-age population.

- **Although all parts of the nation are aging, there is a growing divide between areas that are experiencing gains or losses in their younger populations.** In 36 of the 100 largest metro areas, the population below age 45 declined from 2000 to 2010. Yet in 29 metro areas, the under-45 population grew by at least 10 percent over the decade.

- **Areas experiencing the fastest senior growth are located in the Sun Belt, while areas with the highest concentrations of seniors are located primarily in Florida, the Northeast, and the Midwest.** Yet baby boom generation "pre-seniors," now just turning 65, are growing rapidly in all areas of the country due to aging in place. College towns such as Austin, Raleigh, Provo, and Madison are among those where pre-seniors are growing fastest.

- **Suburbs are aging more rapidly than cities with higher growth rates for their age-45-and-above populations and larger shares of seniors**. People age 45 and older represent 40 percent of suburban residents, compared to 35 percent of city residents.

- **Metropolitan suburbs differ sharply in the degree to which they are attracting young adults and children.** The suburbs of 34 metropolitan areas, mostly in the Northeast and Midwest, registered declines in their child and under-age-45 populations in the 2000s, leaving high concentrations of "advanced middle aged" and older residents. An even larger number of cities experienced losses in these younger populations.

These shifts create implications for age-related public policies and politics in different parts of the country. The demographic future of the nation relies heavily on its youth and the areas where they reside; the challenge in the decades ahead will be to balance their needs with the needs of baby boomers and seniors who are aging-in-place everywhere.

"Decisions about scarce, age-related public resources, such as schools and child care or age-care and senior services, must be made considering changing demographic realities," said Frey. "These constituencies vary greatly across the American landscape."

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