

Is America's Health Care System Ready for the Senior Population Boom?

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To avoid being overwhelmed by the demands of a graying America, government and health care leaders need to advance geriatric, palliative and other care models.

By Mary Helen Gillespie

[Michael J. Dowling, President and CEO, Northwell Health](#), writes in the Dec. 2 issue of [Becker's Hospital Review](#) that while America's health care delivery system has progressed remarkably over the past half-century, the nation's burgeoning senior population poses unprecedented challenges, in terms of both our ability to provide — and pay — for their care.

To avoid being overwhelmed by the demands of a graying America, federal and state governments, health care providers, and medical and nursing schools need to double-down on investments they've already made to advance geriatric, palliative and other care models that have proven beneficial.

"We face significant shortages of [primary care physicians](#) and [geriatricians](#) who specialize in the needs of older adults and those with multiple chronic illnesses. Medical and nursing schools and health systems need to provide financial incentives for clinicians-in-training to enter those areas of medicine instead of more-lucrative specialties. If not, there simply won't be enough doctors or nurses to meet the needs of aging patients," he wrote.

Nearly one-in-five Americans, about [62 million](#) people, are aged 65 or over. Within the next 30 years, that number is expected to reach 84 million – 23% of the population.
