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No, Boomer, Florida's not ready to help you | Editorial

The question remains: Are we taking the necessary steps to prevent the demographic trends from drowning Palm Beach County, South Florida and the state with an aging and underserved population?

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The signs of Florida's pending "Silver Tsunami" are all around us. They are easily dismissed or simply overlooked amid the number of seniors living in our area, who remain a vital and vibrant part of our region's communities and economy.

The term silver tsunami is a metaphor to describe the aging Baby Boomer generation. For years, Florida has been a magnet for America's retirees, and now almost 1 out of 5 residents are 65 years or older. The question — and it's a big one — is Florida doing enough to prevent this growing part of our population from becoming an underserved segment of society? So far, the answer isn't promising, and that had better change sooner rather than later.

Last month, The South Florida Regional Planning Council and the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council met at Florida Atlantic University to discuss ways to head off the crisis. The South Florida and Treasure Coast region simply can't afford to ignore its growing but aging population. The region's competitiveness as a destination depends on how well it shores up needed services to address the silver tsunami on its way.

The Post's View: Condo costs crush in Florida while politicians shrug | Editorial

Florida ignores aging population at its own peril

The silver tsunami isn't limited to Florida. The aging of America's 73 million Baby Boomers, persons born between 1945 and 1965, will have significant impact on our society and everyday life. People 65 and older account for more than a third of the nation's health care spending. Older Americans are also having an impact on the workplace, which is adjusting to employees forgoing retirement, leaving employers with new challenges from an older workforce.

For Florida, the problem should be more obvious than the occasional traffic fatality of an elderly motorist or the growing chorus of retirees who now face six-figure assessments to stay in their aging condominium communities.

Projections discussed at the FAU conference show that the 85-plus population in southeast Florida will more than double in the next 25 years. In Palm Beach County, the figure is expected to increase to 146,000 people from today's 66,000, a 121% increase. Broward and Martin counties will see similar spikes as more retirees move to Florida, joining those already here.

Florida already faces a shortage of physicians. In 2035, the Florida Safety Net Hospital Alliance and the Florida Hospital Association projects a shortfall of 17,924 physicians in the Sunshine State, including geriatricians, those doctors trained to address the needs of the elderly. Couple this with meager state funding for aging at home versus nursing home care, mental health and transportation services, and you can see how kicking the can down the road is not an option.

When it comes to addressing this problem, Florida is beyond a quick fix. For example, closing legal loopholes that allow seniors to drive when they shouldn't won't cut it in a community that lacks adequate public transportation that lets seniors to maintain a life by getting out and enjoy their communities. Florida needs a better social infrastructure to accommodate its growing senior population. The needs are complex and the solutions are challenging.

Last month's conference at FAU was a wake-up call. The hope here is that local and state officials heard it.