

Causes of Death

It is important to examine the causes of death in a community to identify deaths that could have been prevented. Policies, programs, and educational campaigns can then be instituted to avert further deaths from these causes. Life expectancy, death rates, and leading causes of death in Whatcom County are covered in this chapter.

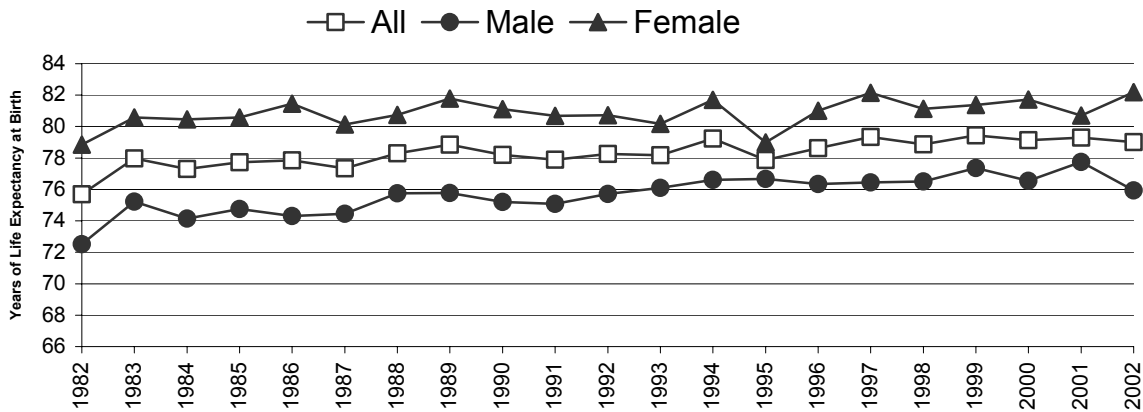
Causes of Death Snapshot	
Female life expectancy	82 years
Male life expectancy	76 years
Death rate for all causes	7.75/1000
Leading causes of death:	
Age 1-44	injuries
Age 45-74	cancer
Age 75+	cardiovascular disease

Life Expectancy

A starting point is to measure changes in life expectancy, which is the number of years a person born in a given year could expect to live. Life expectancy in Whatcom County improved somewhat between 1982 and

2002. However, there is a significant difference in life expectancy based on sex. Life expectancy for men born in Whatcom County in 2002 is 76 years while for women it is 82 years (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Overall and Gender-Linked Life Expectancy

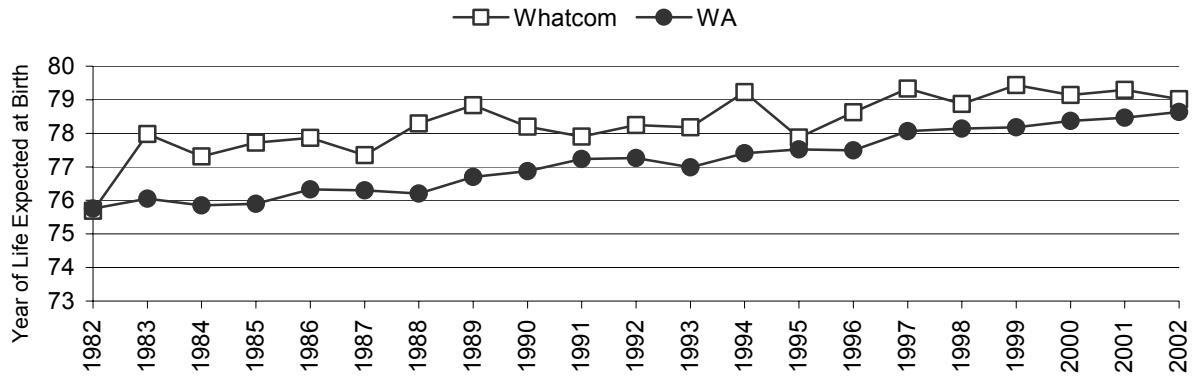


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Whatcom County residents have consistently had longer life expectancies than Washington residents as a whole. However, in recent years, the life

expectancy of Washington residents has increased to close to the Whatcom County life expectancy (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Comparing Life Expectancy for Residents



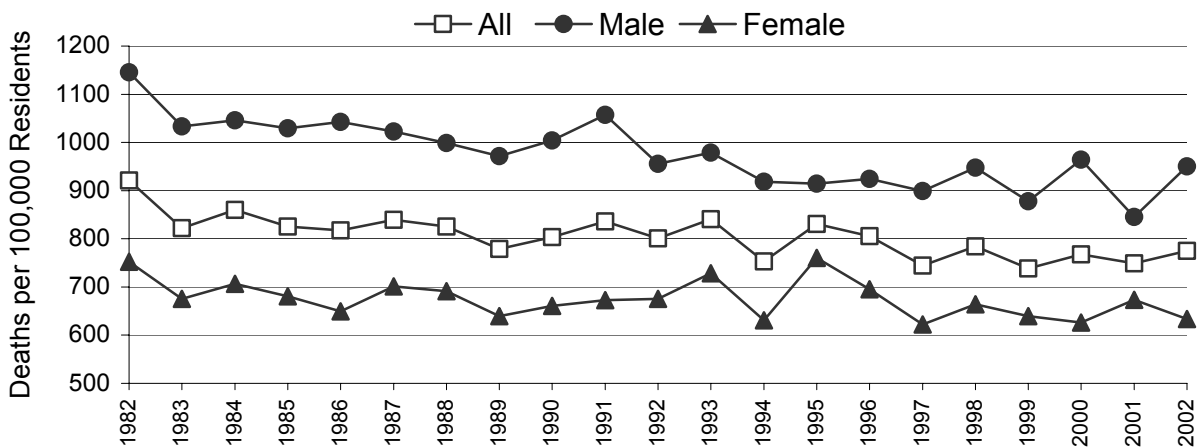
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Death Rates

Another indicator of community health is the rate of death of residents. Since populations with many young people typically have low death rates and those with many older people have high death rates, it is important

to look at age-adjusted rates. The Whatcom County age-adjusted death rate has decreased slightly since 1982, especially for men. However, men continue to have a higher death rate than women (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Age-Adjusted Death Rates For All Causes by Sex

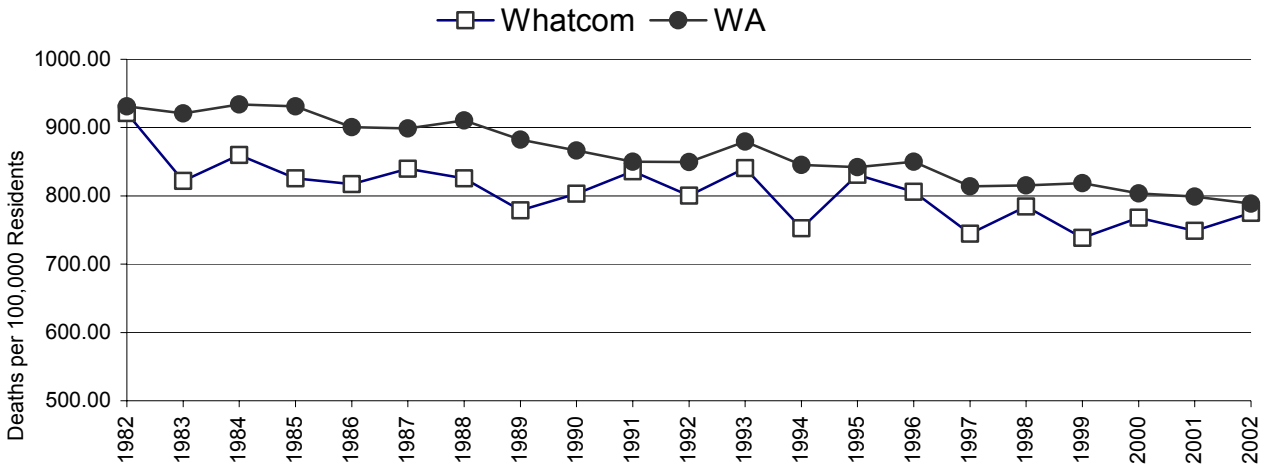


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Whatcom County has consistently had a lower death rate than that for Washington State as a whole. However, the state death

rate is decreasing more quickly, causing it to approach Whatcom County's rate (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Comparing Death Rates for All Causes

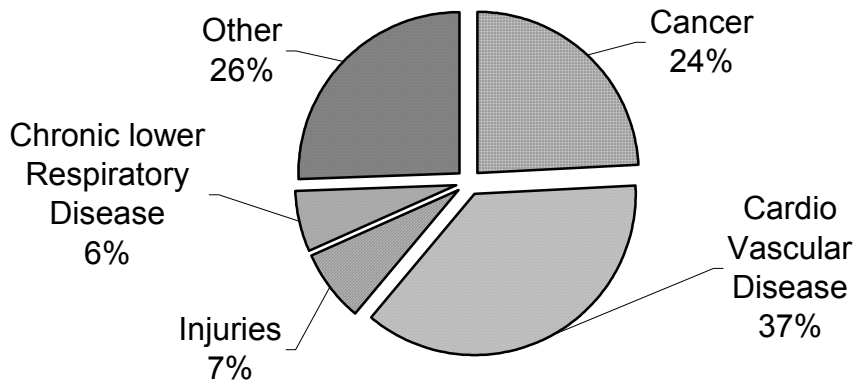


Leading Causes of Death

Between 1998 and 2002, 6102 Whatcom County residents died; this is an average of 1220 people per year. The leading cause of death was cardiovascular disease (CVD), followed by cancer, injuries, and chronic lower respiratory disease (Figure 5). Looking within these categories we can begin to identify behaviors that contributed to these deaths. The largest forms of CVD were ischemic heart disease (48% of CVD

deaths) and stroke (23% of CVD deaths). Ischemic heart disease is caused by the build up of fat deposits in the body's major blood vessels and is generally considered to be preventable through a healthy diet, adequate exercise and no tobacco use. Lung cancer was the most common form of cancer death at 24% of cancer deaths. Also, 25% of fatal injuries were the result of motor vehicle crashes.

**Figure 5 Leading Causes of Death
1998 to 2002 (Total deaths = 6102)**



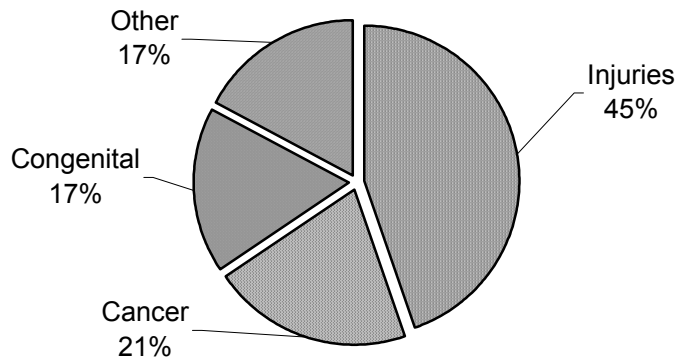
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Leading Causes of Death by Age

The leading causes of death change depending upon the age group we are examining. For example, younger persons are more likely to die from injuries while older persons are more likely to die from chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer.

Among children aged 1-14, death is a rare event, however, for children aged 1 to 14, almost half of the 29 deaths between 1998 and 2002 were cause by injuries (Figure 6). Approximately one third of these injury deaths were due to motor vehicle crashes and another third were due to intentional injury: homicide and suicide.

Figure 6 Leading Causes of Death in 1-14 year olds 1998-2002 (Total Deaths = 29)

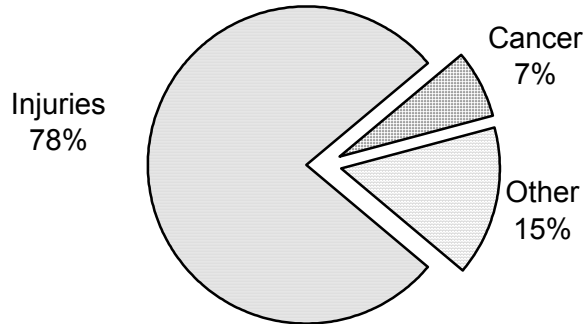


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Injuries contributed to even a larger percentage of deaths among people aged 15 to 24 years (Figure 7).

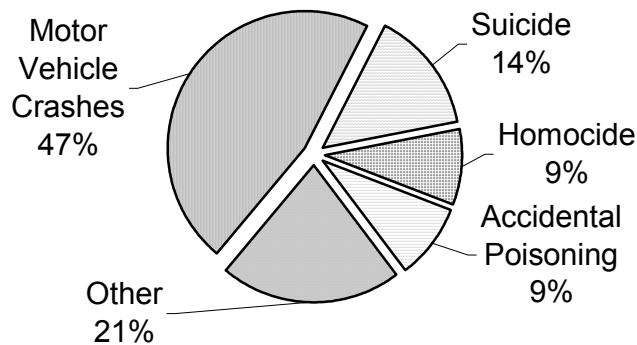
Motor vehicle crashes made up almost half of these injury deaths. Followed by suicide, homicide, and accidental poisoning (Figure 8).

Figure 7 Leading Causes of Death in 15 to 24 year olds 1998-2002 (N=72)



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Figure 8 Types of Injury Deaths Among 15 to 24 Year Olds 1998-2002 (N=56)

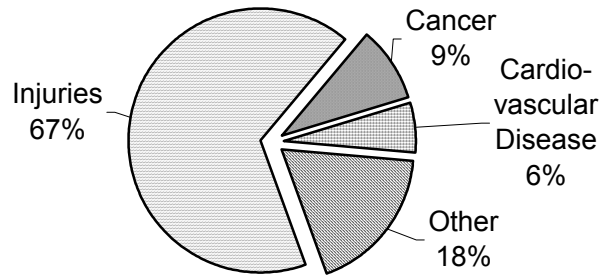


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Two-thirds of deaths among persons aged 25 to 34 were due to injuries. This is followed by cancer and cardiovascular disease (Figure 9).

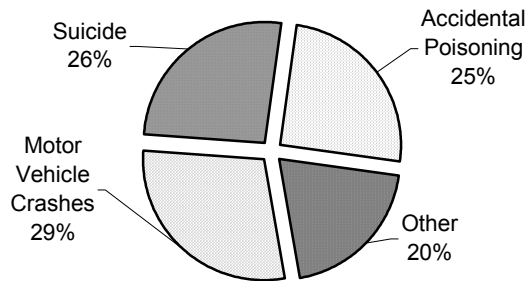
Motor vehicle crashes, suicide, and accidental poisoning each attributed to one-quarter of injury deaths (Figure 10).

Figure 9 Leading Causes of Death in 25 to 34 Year Olds 1998-2002 (Total Deaths = 98)



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Figure 10 Types of Injury Deaths Among 25 to 34 Year Olds 1998-2002 (N=65)

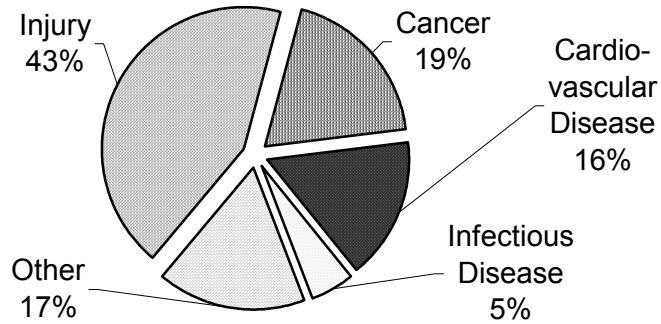


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Injuries are still the most common cause of death among 35 to 44 year olds. However, chronic diseases start playing a more significant role (Figure 11).

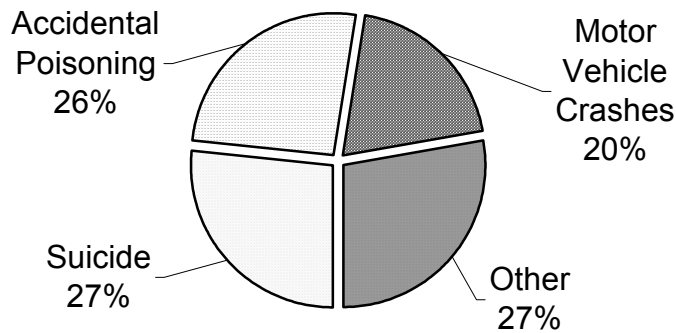
The most common types of injuries in this age group again are suicide, accidental poisoning, and motor vehicle crashes (Figure 12).

Figure 11 Leading Causes of Death for 35 to 44 Year Olds 1998-2002 (N=228)



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Figure 12 Types of Injury Deaths for 35 to 44 Year Olds 1998-2002 (N=98)

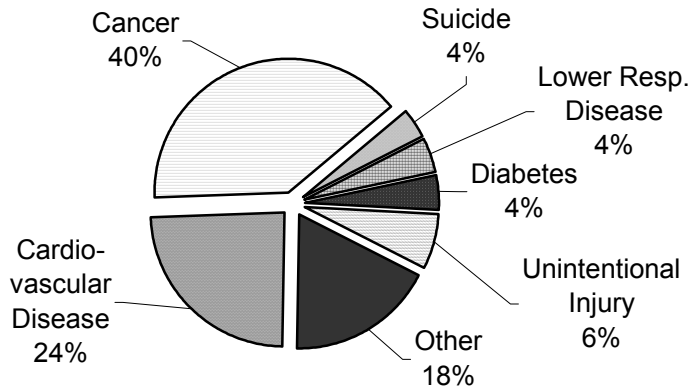


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Logically, the number of deaths increases with older age groups. For deaths in the 45 to 64 age group, chronic diseases, such as cancer and cardiovascular disease, emerge

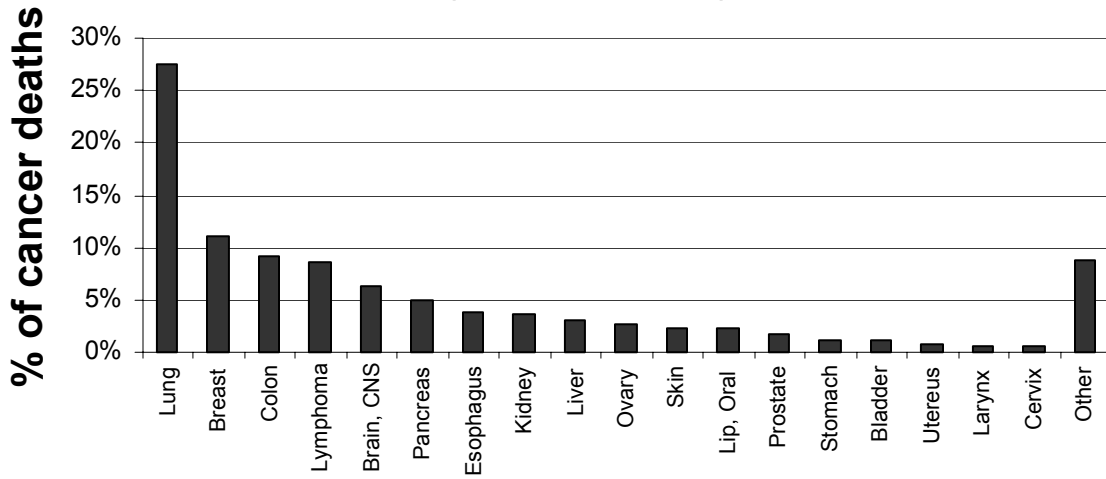
as leading causes (Figure 13). Lung cancer was by far the most common cancer death contributing to 27% of cancer deaths in this age group (Figure 14).

Figure 13 Leading Causes of Death for 45 to 64 Year Olds 1998-2002 (total deaths = 914)



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Figure 14 Types of Cancer Deaths in 45 to 64 Year Olds 1998-2002 (Total Deaths = 361)

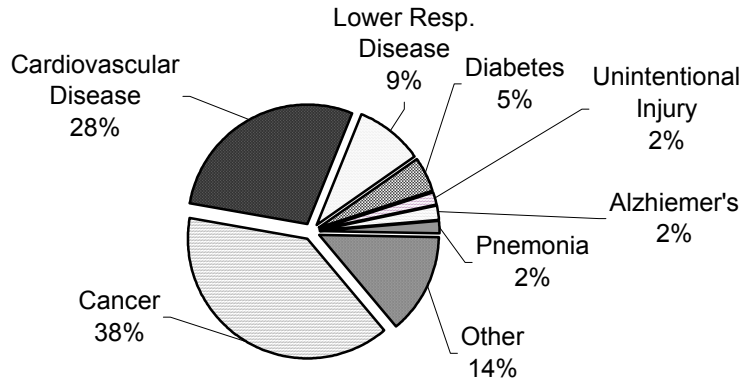


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Cardiovascular disease and cancer are the leading causes of death in persons aged 65 to 74 years (Figure 15).

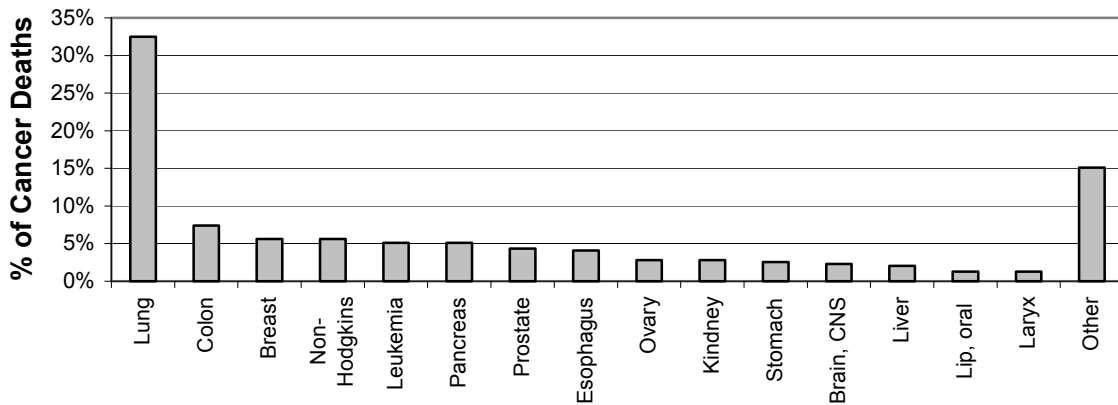
Lung cancer accounted for 33% of cancer deaths in this age group (Figure 16).

**Figure 15 Leading Causes of Death in 65 to 74 Year Olds
1998-2002 (Total Deaths = 1006)**



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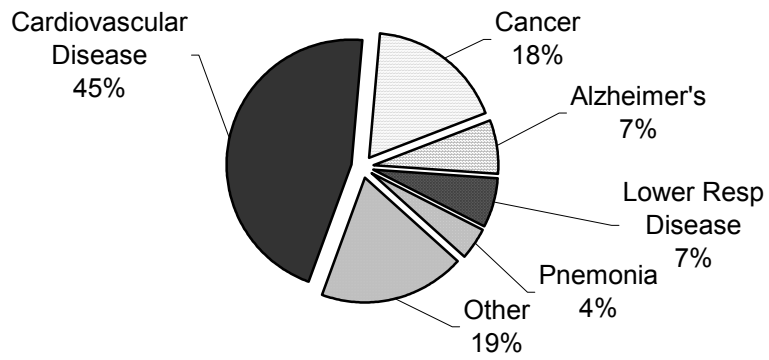
**Figure 16 Types of Cancer Deaths in 65 to 74 Year Olds
1998-2002 (Total Deaths = 391)**



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Cardiovascular disease becomes the most prominent cause of death in our oldest age group, those 75 and over (Figure 17).

Figure 17 Leading Causes of Death in Persons 75 and Over 1998-2002 (Total Deaths = 3702)



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Data Sources – Chapter 3

Figures 1, 2: Life Expectancy

WA Department of Health, Vista Partnership
VistaPhW: Life Expectancy Tables, at age 0

Figures 3, 4: Death Rates

WA Department of Health, Vista Partnership
VistaPhW: Death Rates, All Causes, Age Adjusted to 2000 population

Figures 5 – 17: Death Rates by Age

WA Department of Health, Vista Partnership
VistaPhW: Death Rates, age-specific