

# Population estimates for 2022

## Alaska grew slightly for a second year after 4-year drop

By DAVID HOWELL

Alaska grew slightly during each of the last two years, with the population increasing by about 450 people in 2022. Although recent gains were small, any growth would be notable after four straight years of population loss.

Despite the resumed growth, Alaska's future population patterns remain uncertain. Trends have been blurred by the pandemic, and by the two new F-35 squadrons that arrived at Eielson Air Force Base between 2020 and 2022, which provided a one-time boost.

### Ten years of net migration losses

Alaska's net migration has been negative for 10 straight years; we lost 53,400 more residents to migration than we gained during that period. The last time the state gained more

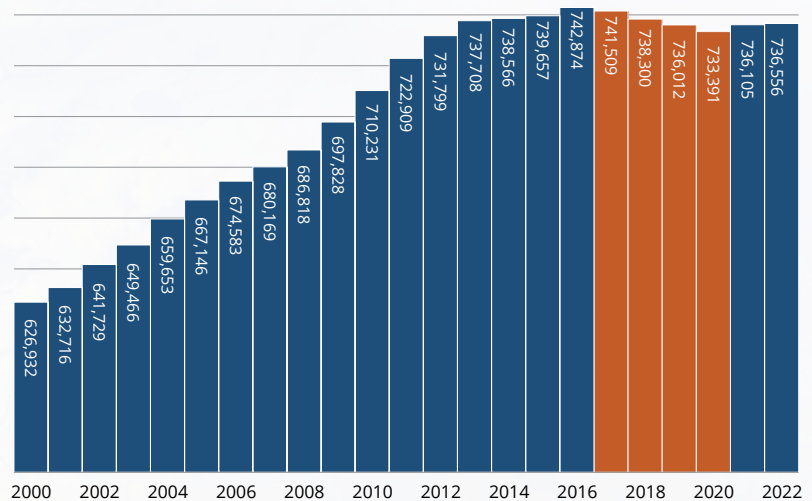
migrants than it lost was in 2012 when people from the Lower 48 were still escaping the aftermath of the Great Recession, which barely brushed Alaska. By 2013, the nation had recovered most of the jobs it lost during the recession, and people began leaving Alaska at a faster rate, shifting our net migration to loss.

The last two years' net migration

### A note about dates

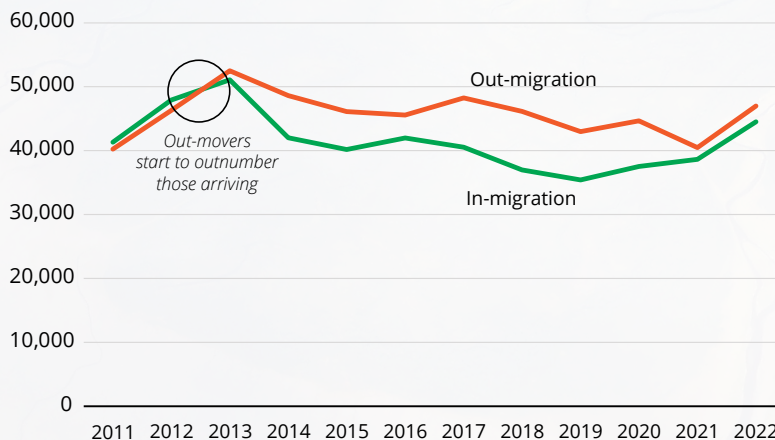
Births, deaths, and migration numbers are all measured from July 1 of one year to June 30 of the next. For simplicity, all references in this article are to the end point year. For example, a reference to the number of deaths in 2022 is the number measured from July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022.

Total Alaska population, 2000 to 2022



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

### More out-movers than in-movers since 2013



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

declines were the smallest of the decade streak, although it's too early to tell whether Alaska's migration trend is changing or the pandemic temporarily shifted it.

In 2020 and 2021, COVID-19 mitigation put a hold on many of the reasons people move, slowing migration both out of and into Alaska. One move that wasn't delayed was the F-35s and personnel to Eielson. This influx shrank Alaska's migration loss in 2021, allowing the population to grow for the first time in four years.

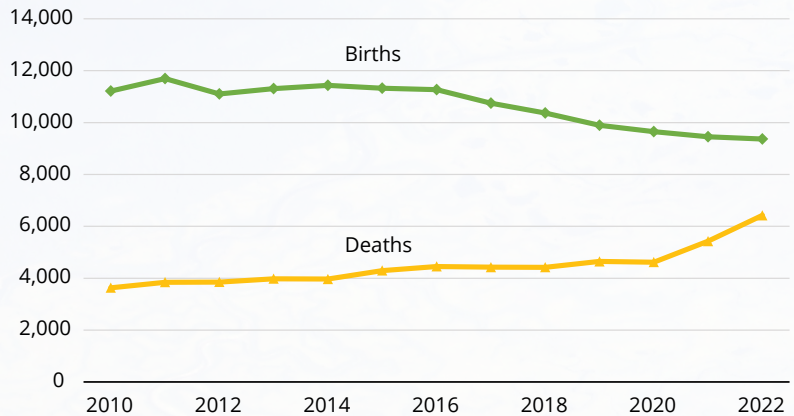
Migration increased all over the U.S. again as COVID restrictions lifted and life began to return to normal, and Alaska was no exception. More people moved to Alaska in 2022 than in any year since 2013, but it still wasn't enough to flip net migration positive; more people also *left* Alaska than in any year since 2017.

## Natural increase was the lowest it has been since the 1950s

COVID-19 also drove up Alaska's mortality. Deaths rose 39 percent in 2022 from the pre-pandemic years. While deaths were elevated in 2020 and 2021 as well, the Delta variant wave that began in late 2021 drove a much larger increase than the first pandemic year.

From July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022, 6,400 Alaskans died — 1,000 more than the previous year and 1,800 more than 2020.

## Alaska births decline amid rise in deaths



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Natural increase, which is births minus deaths, has fallen further with the decline in births. Births decreased recently for the eighth consecutive year, although the decline was much smaller than what we've seen in recent years. As with other components of population change, it's hard to tell whether births are leveling off or the decline wasn't as large as it would have been because pandemic uncertainty delayed births the year before.

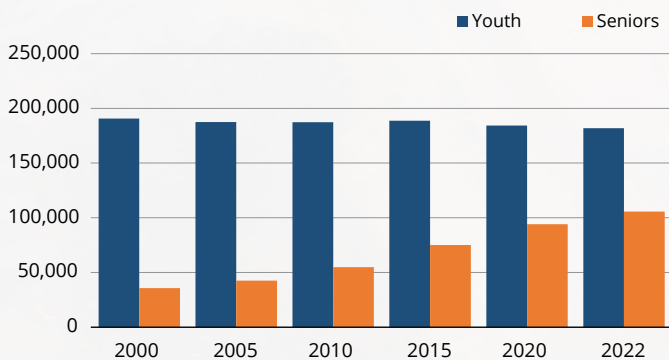
With deaths up and births down, Alaska netted just 2,900 new residents through natural increase last year (see the graph above), the smallest amount since 1951 when Alaska had 575,000 fewer people. Deaths aren't likely to stay at this elevated level, so we anticipate natural increase will go back up in the coming years.

The rise in deaths led to natural decrease — deaths outnumbering births — in eight of the state's 30 boroughs and census areas. Most have smaller and older populations with already-low birth rates, such as Southeast, where half of its boroughs and census areas recorded natural decrease.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough is also older but its pattern didn't quite fit the mold. Even though the borough is the state's fourth-largest, it recorded a natural decrease of just one person.

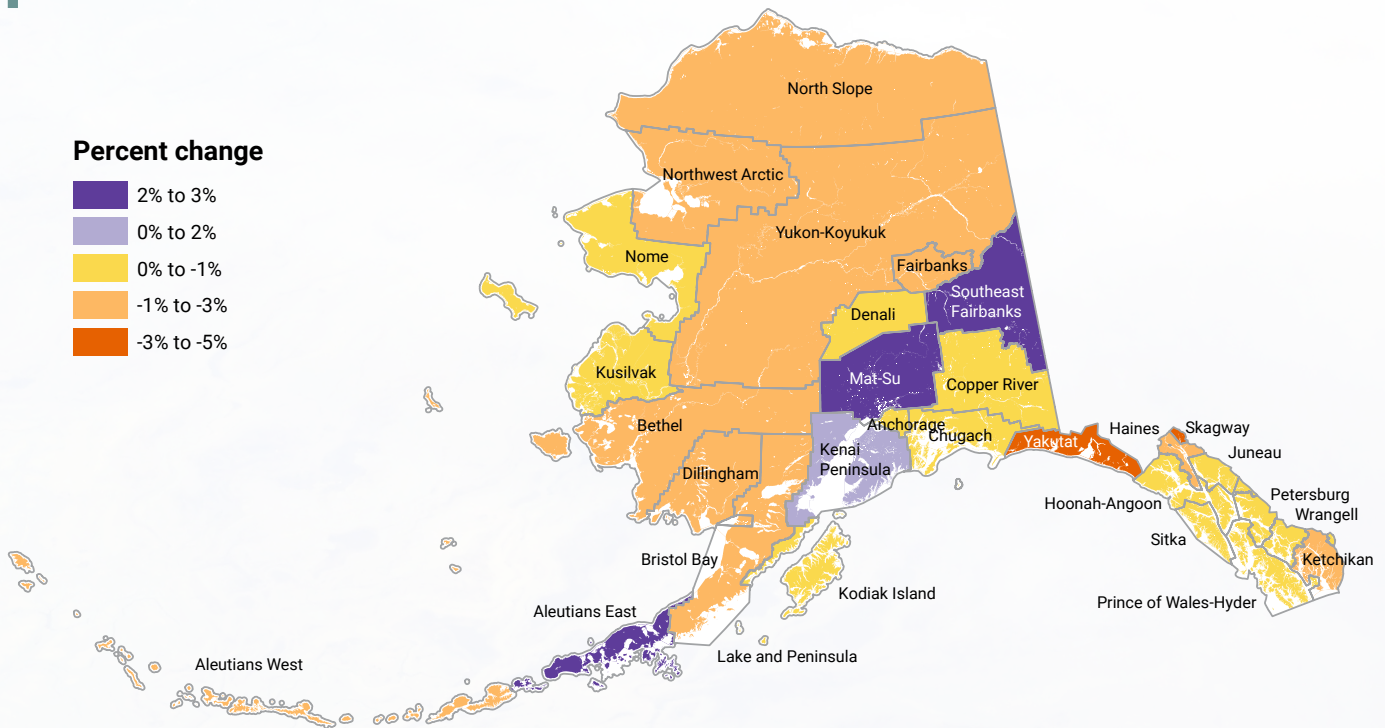
The other areas with natural decrease in 2022 were the Copper River Census Area, the Ketchikan Gateway Borough, Petersburg, the Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area, Wrangell, Yakutat, and the Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area.

## Alaska has more seniors, fewer kids



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

# Percent change in Alaska area populations from 2021 to 2022



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

## Youth population decreasing

Before 2015, Alaska’s population from birth to age 17 had been about the same size for 10 years.

Births in Alaska have been declining since 2016, falling by 400 to 500 a year for several consecutive years before the declines began to slow in 2019. This steadily shrunk the youth population, and barring a change in migration patterns, the rate of decline will speed up in the coming years.

Alaska had 1,500 more 17-year-olds than newborns in 2022, and as these teens age into their working years, we will see steady and large declines in the 0-17 population as fewer babies replace them.

Right now, the size of the population entering school ages (5 to 17) isn’t much different from those aging out — in 2022, Alaska had 10,000 17-year-olds and 9,800 kids who will turn five in 2023. The school-age group will reflect this large decline in births in the coming years, though, and decreases in this group’s size will accelerate over the next five.

The biggest differences in population size were

at the youngest ages. In 2022, Alaska had 1,800 more 5-year-olds than newborns. When this group of infants begins entering school, we will see the elementary age group start to shrink and then the middle and high school cohorts decrease as they get older.

## 65+ population continues to rise

The biggest story of the last decade was baby boomers turning 65. Alaska’s senior population grew from 54,900 in 2010 to 94,000 in 2020, and this growth has not slowed. The senior population has grown 12 percent over the last two years alone, reaching 105,600 in 2022. The trend will continue for a while, as the youngest of the boomers will not turn 65 until 2029.

Over the next decade, we’ll see this same growth in the population 75 and older. Between 2020 and 2022, the number of elders rose 17 percent, from 30,100 to 35,100. The rise will accelerate in the coming years, and as it does, Alaska’s health care industry will have to ramp up to provide the needed services.

Continued on page 18

# 2022 POPULATION

Continued from page 13

## Working-age group declining

---

The working-age population continues to decline for several reasons. As the article on page 4 details, Alaska is losing people ages 18 to 64 to migration. We're also not gaining workers through aging anymore, because the number of 18-year-olds is about the same as the number of 64-year-olds. (See the first article in this issue for more.)

## Change around the state in 2022

---

The Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna Region grew the most by far, all in Mat-Su. Anchorage's population began declining in 2016, and while Anchorage lost people for a sixth straight year in 2022, the loss was much smaller. Mat-Su's growth accelerated, however, to nearly 2,700. That was the borough's biggest increase since 2010, and it offset Anchorage's losses for a net regional gain of around 2,000 people.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough grew enough through net migration to increase the larger Gulf Coast Region's population. Kenai is a popular retirement spot for people from Southcentral.

Aside from the Kenai Peninsula, all boroughs and census areas in the region lost people to migration and lost small numbers of people overall.

The Interior lost population over the year but remained above its 2020 Census count. The Southeast Fairbanks Census Area gained 150 people, but

losses in the Fairbanks North Star Borough lowered the regional population. That was a loss on paper only, though. The borough's decline came from the military, whose population was artificially inflated the year before because of survey timing. When we surveyed bases in 2021, it was between troop transfers; the in-transfers were already there but those set to leave hadn't departed yet.

The Northern Region lost population in both of the last two years. Historically, the region has grown through natural increase offsetting small net migration losses, but migration out of the region has risen since 2020 and births have fallen.

Southeast's population has been decreasing since 2014. The region typically loses residents to net migration, and with an older population, it doesn't gain as much through natural increase. Skagway was a big exception over the last decade, as it was one of the fastest-growing areas in Alaska. However, the pandemic's virtual shutdown of the cruise ship industry led to population losses there too.

The Southwest Region's pattern resembles the Northern Region, with bigger net migration losses during the last two years that led to an overall decline as natural increase couldn't offset the decreases. The Aleutians East Borough was an exception last year, as it had the highest net migration rate in the state. This was probably a one-off for Aleutians East, as most of the influx was seafood processing plants regaining their pre-pandemic staffing levels.

Full 2022 population estimates:  
[live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/index.cfm](https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/index.cfm)

David Howell is the state demographer. Reach him in Juneau at (907) 465-6029 or [david.howell@alaska.gov](mailto:david.howell@alaska.gov).