

Volunteering Produces Health Benefits

New Report Shows Helping Others Improves Your Wellbeing and Longevity

Washington, D.C. – Volunteers help themselves to better health while helping others, according to a study released today by the Corporation for National and Community Service that reviews a compelling collection of recent scientific research.

The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research has found a significant connection between volunteering and good health. The report shows that volunteers have greater longevity, higher functional ability, lower rates of depression and less incidence of heart disease. The report is available by [clicking here](#).



“Volunteering makes the heart grow stronger,” said David Eisner, CEO of the Corporation. “More than 61 million Americans volunteer to improve conditions for people in need and to unselfishly give of themselves. While the motivation is altruistic, it is gratifying to learn that their efforts are returning considerable health benefits.”

The Health Benefits of Volunteering documents major findings from more than 30 rigorous and longitudinal studies that reviewed the relationship between health and volunteering, with particular emphasis on studies that seek to determine the causal connection between the two factors. The studies, which were controlled for other factors, found that volunteering leads to improved physical and mental health.

“I commend the Corporation for National and Community Service for its timely focus on health and volunteerism. These findings complement the Administration on Aging's ongoing efforts to harness the power of prevention and wellness for all older Americans. Volunteerism is an important tool in our strategy to promote health and prevent disease,” said Josefina G. Carbonell, Assistant Secretary for Aging at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Research suggests that volunteering is particularly beneficial to the health of older adults and those serving 100 hours annually. According to the report:

- A study of adults age 65 and older found that the positive effect of volunteering on physical and mental health is due to the personal sense of accomplishment an individual gains from his or her volunteer activities.
- Another study found that volunteering led to lower rates of depression in individuals 65 and older.
- A Duke study found that individuals who volunteered after experiencing heart attacks reported reductions in despair and depression – two factors that have been linked to mortality in post-coronary artery disease patients.
- An analysis of longitudinal data found that individuals over 70 who volunteered approximately 100 hours had less of a decline in self-reported health and functioning levels, experienced lower levels of depression, and had more longevity.
- Two studies found that volunteering threshold is about 100 hours per year, or about two hours a week. Individuals who reached the threshold enjoyed significant health benefits, although there were not additional benefits beyond the 100-hour mark.

“This is good news for people who volunteer,” said Robert Grimm, Director of the Corporation’s Office of Research and Policy Development and Senior Counselor to the CEO. “This research is particularly relevant to Baby Boomers, who are receiving as well as giving when they help others. Just two hours of volunteering a week can bring meaningful benefits to a person’s body and mind.”

Last month, the Corporation released *Volunteering in America: 2007 State Trends and Rankings in Civic Life*, a report that includes numerous measures on volunteering and civic engagement. The Health Benefits of Volunteering report builds on that by showing states with higher volunteer rates also have better health and that there is a significant statistical relationship between states with higher volunteer rates and lower incidents of mortality and heart disease.

“There is now a convergence of research leading to the conclusion that helping others makes people happier and healthier. So the word is out – it's good to be good. Science increasingly says so,” said Dr. Stephen Post, a professor at the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and co-author of the forthcoming book “Why Good Things Happen to Good People: The Exciting New Research That Proves the Link Between Doing Good and Living a Longer, Healthier, Happier Life.”

This follow-up report issued today brings more evidence that volunteering produces significant health benefits. Those who gave social support to others had lower rates of mortality than those who did not – even when controlling for socioeconomic status, education, marital status, age, gender, and ethnicity, the report stated.

“Civic Engagement and volunteering is the new hybrid health club for the 21st century that's free to join,” added Thomas H. Sander, executive director of the Saguaro Seminar at Harvard University. Social capital research shows it miraculously improves both your health AND the community's through the work performed and the social ties built.”

The Corporation for National and Community Service improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Each year, the Corporation provides opportunities for more than 2 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America. For more information, visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov>.



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