EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CANADA STUDY RESULTS
Introduction

Seniors in Canada are rolling up their sleeves in big ways to make a difference in their communities through volunteerism. According to a national study conducted by Home Instead, Inc., 47% of seniors volunteer their time through unpaid community service. For many of these seniors, helping others defines who they are in their retirement years. Not only are they changing their communities, but they are Changing the Face of Aging®. These seniors see no end in sight to their community service.

Home Instead, Inc. interviewed 400 senior volunteers to measure their community impact and to better understand the motivations driving their volunteerism. The key findings include:

- One in six senior volunteers says he or she started volunteering at the age of 65 or older.
- Ninety-eight percent of seniors who volunteer say their volunteer work is important in comparison to other things they do in their lives.
- Three in five seniors who volunteer say they plan on volunteering “forever.” This percentage is slightly higher for senior volunteers who suffer from chronic health problems.
- Nearly half of volunteers who are retired say they are busier now than when they were working.
- The seniors’ most common activities are hands-on projects/general labour; visiting people or companionship; fundraising projects and preparing, collecting or distributing food.
- Senior volunteers donate an average of 16.5 hours a month to diverse causes including churches, senior centres, hospitals, schools and nonprofit organizations. There is no significant difference in the amount of time volunteered by younger seniors (65 to 74) and older seniors (75 plus).
- Almost all senior volunteers give time to causes in their community because they want to help others and make a meaningful difference.
- Nearly all senior volunteers feel better emotionally and physically when they volunteer.
- Seven in 10 senior volunteers say they overcome feeling isolated and depressed by volunteering.
- Ninety-three percent of senior volunteers feel that seniors who volunteer are healthier and happier than seniors who do not volunteer.
- Eighty-six percent of senior volunteers who suffer from chronic health conditions say that staying active through volunteering helps them manage their health problems.
- Nearly three in five senior volunteers say they are volunteering more now because the need is greater as result of the poor economy.
- A majority of senior volunteers put their money where their time is by donating financially to the organizations where they volunteer.

As a result of this study, Home Instead, Inc. has launched the Salute to Senior Service® program at (SalutetoSeniorService.ca) to honour the many volunteer contributions that older adults make to this nation. This program includes a search for the country’s most outstanding Senior Heroes® and culminates with the selection of a national Salute to Senior Service winner. In addition to showcasing senior volunteers in their communities, the program features important information about the benefits of volunteerism from the Home Instead, Inc. and Jean-Guy Soulière, Chair of the National Seniors Council, a national organization that advises the Government of Canada on all matters related to the well-being and quality of life of seniors. It provides advice to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, the Minister of Health, and the Minister of State (Seniors).
Study Methodology
Home Instead, Inc. completed 400 telephone interviews with seniors age 65 and older in Canada who volunteer their time through unpaid community service. The sampling error is +/-4.9% at a 95% confidence level.

Volunteering: The Why

For a vast majority of seniors who volunteer, their community service helps define who they are. Ninety-eight percent say that, when compared to other things they do in their lives, volunteering is important. One in six senior volunteers (17%) says it is the most important thing they do.

The availability of more time now in their lives is just one of the reasons many volunteer. More importantly, they want to be agents for change in their communities. Their motivations include:

• 99% want to help others
• 97% want to make a meaningful difference in their communities
• 97% want to provide assistance to causes they care about

A majority of senior volunteers (58%) say they are volunteering more now because the need is greater as a result of the slow economy.

Senior volunteers say they experience significant health and emotional benefits from volunteering. Most (93%) feel that seniors who volunteer are healthier and happier than those who do not volunteer. The specific personal benefits that keep seniors volunteering are:

• I stay active and feel better physically 99%
• I gain a sense of purpose 98%
• I feel better mentally and emotionally 98%
• I am able to overcome feeling isolated 71%
• I am able to overcome feeling depressed 70%

Many seniors enjoy the socialization aspect of volunteering. Four in 10 seniors (38%) say they typically volunteer with someone else, usually a friend or their spouse.

A call to volunteering is passed from generation to generation. A majority of senior volunteers (51%) say they learned the importance of volunteering from their parents’ community service and most senior volunteers (84%) say they have encouraged their children to give back to their communities.

These seniors report relatively few barriers that prevent them from volunteering more in their communities. The most common barriers are their disabilities, health issues or physical limitations (19%), inability to make long-term commitments (16%) and limited financial resources (14%).

Social, Health and Emotional Motivations to Volunteering

The following percentages refer to the number of senior volunteers who say these are important reasons they volunteer in their community:

99% I feel better physically when I volunteer
99% I want to help others
98% I gain a sense of purpose
98% I feel better mentally and emotionally when I volunteer
97% I want to make a difference in my community
97% I feel like my volunteer contributions are appreciated
97% I want to provide assistance to causes I care about
91% I enjoy volunteering with my friends
90% I want to socialize and meet new people
88% I have more time now
87% I want to share my talents, skills and experience
85% I enjoy learning new skills
84% I want to occupy my free time
71% I am able to overcome feeling isolated
70% I am able to overcome feeling depressed
Volunteering and Chronic Health Conditions
Volunteering pays special dividends for seniors who have chronic health conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, depression, high blood pressure, dementia or Alzheimer’s disease. Eighty-six per cent of these seniors say that staying active through volunteering helps them manage their chronic conditions.

Seniors with chronic conditions devote slightly more hours to community service each month when compared with seniors who have no chronic conditions. They are more likely than other seniors to say that their volunteer hours will decrease in the next five years, but they also are more likely to say they plan to continue volunteering forever. The emotional benefits of volunteering are particularly relevant for seniors with chronic conditions. For example, 77% of seniors with chronic conditions say an important reason they volunteer is to overcome feeling depressed, compared to 62% of seniors without chronic conditions.

Volunteering: The Who, What and How
The vast majority of senior volunteers are retired (90%) and almost half of the retirees (43%) feel as if they are busier now than before they retired.

One-third of senior volunteers started volunteering in their communities before they were 40; on the other hand, one-sixth got their start at 65 or older.

In addition to their volunteer activities, one-fifth of senior volunteers are caring for grandchildren (20%) and/or are caring for their spouse or other senior loved ones (22%).

The typical senior volunteer devotes an average of 16.5 hours per month to volunteer activities. About one-third of senior volunteers (32%) are volunteering more than 20 hours a month. In the next five years, a majority of seniors (73%) say the amount of time they spend volunteering will remain the same as it is now. Three in five senior volunteers (62%) say they plan on volunteering “forever” or they see no end to their community service activities.

Senior volunteers devote their time to a variety of causes and organizations. On average, they are donating their time between two organizations, including churches/religious groups (53%), senior centres and senior-related services (43%), hospitals and healthcare organizations (21%), schools and educational services (21%), and nonprofit organizations (14%).

The top five senior volunteer activities are:

- Hands-on projects and general labour 47%
- Visiting people or companionship 42%
- Fundraising projects 35%
- Preparing, collecting or distributing food 34%
- Training/teaching/coaching 20%

Six in 10 senior volunteers donate funds or materials to support the organizations at which they volunteer. Annually they donate an average of $452.