EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

U.S. STUDY RESULTS
Introduction

Seniors in America 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., 52% 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 600 senior volunteers to measure their community impact and to better understand the motivations driving their volunteerism. The key findings include:

- One in five senior volunteers says he or she started volunteering at the age of 65 or older.
- Ninety-nine percent of seniors who volunteer say their volunteer work is important in comparison to other things they do in their lives.
- Seven in 10 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 labor; preparing, collecting or distributing food; and visiting people and providing companionship.
- Senior volunteers donate an average of 15 hours a month to diverse causes including churches, schools, hospitals, senior centers 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-five percent of senior volunteers feel that seniors who volunteer are healthier and happier than seniors who do not volunteer.
- Three-fourths of senior volunteers who suffer from chronic health conditions say that staying active through volunteering helps them manage their health problems.
- 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.com to honor the many volunteer contributions that older adults make to this nation. This program includes a search for the country’s most outstanding Senior Hero in each state 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 volunteering from Home Instead, Inc. and Dr. Erwin Tan, executive director of Senior Corps, a national organization that links more than 500,000 Americans 55 and older to service opportunities such as the Foster Grandparent program, the Senior Companion Program and RSVP - a program that matches service opportunities with the skills and availability of seniors.
Study Methodology
Home Instead, Inc. completed 600 telephone interviews with seniors age 65 and older in the U.S. who volunteer their time through unpaid community service. The sampling error is +/-4.0% 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-nine percent say that, when compared to other things they do in their lives, volunteering is important. One in five senior volunteers 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
- 99% want to make a meaningful difference in their communities
- 99% want to provide assistance to causes they care about

A majority of senior volunteers (61%) say they are volunteering more now because the need is greater as a result of the poor economy.

Senior volunteers say they experience significant health and emotional benefits from volunteering. Most (95%) 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 gain a sense of purpose 98%
- I stay active and feel better physically 98%
- I feel better mentally and emotionally 98%
- I am able to overcome feeling isolated 74%
- I am able to overcome feeling depressed 70%

Many seniors enjoy the socialization aspect of volunteering. Four in 10 seniors (41%) 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 (53%) 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, mentioned by 21% of senior volunteers, are their disabilities, health issues or physical limitations. Seniors who have lower monthly budgets for living expenses tend to have more barriers than other seniors including disabilities and health issues (32%), limited financial resources (23%), inability to make a long-term commitment (20%) and lack of transportation (18%).

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 want to help others
- 99% I want to make a difference in my community
- 99% I want to provide assistance to causes I care about
- 98% I gain a sense of purpose
- 98% I feel better mentally and emotionally when I volunteer
- 98% I feel better physically when I volunteer
- 98% I feel like my volunteer contributions are appreciated
- 93% I enjoy volunteering with my friends
- 92% I want to socialize and meet new people
- 90% I want to share my talents, skills and experience
- 89% I enjoy learning new skills
- 86% I have more time now
- 89% I want to occupy my free time
- 74% I am able to overcome feeling isolated
- 70% I am able to overcome feeling depressed
Volunteering and Chronic Health Conditions
Volunteering can pay special dividends for seniors who have chronic health conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, depression, high blood pressure, dementia or Alzheimer’s disease. Three-fourths 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 with 63% of seniors without chronic conditions.

Volunteering: The Who, What and How
The vast majority of senior volunteers are retired (92%) and almost half of the retirees (47%) feel as if they are busier now than before they retired.

One-third of senior volunteers (34%) started volunteering in their communities before they were 40; on the other hand, nearly one-fifth got their start at 65 or older.

In addition to their volunteer activities, more than one-quarter of senior volunteers are caring for grandchildren (30%) and/or are caring for their spouse or other senior loved ones (26%).

The typical senior volunteer devotes an average of 15 hours per month to volunteer activities. About one-quarter of senior volunteers (27%) are volunteering more than 20 hours a month. In the next five years, a majority of seniors (74%) say the amount of time they spend volunteering will remain the same as it is now.

Seven in 10 senior volunteers (70%) 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 (63%), senior centers and senior-related services (29%), schools and educational services (19%), nonprofit organizations (18%), and hospitals and healthcare organizations (15%).

The top five senior volunteer activities are:
- Hands-on projects and general labor 45%
- Preparing, collecting or distributing food 42%
- Visiting people or companionship 37%
- Fundraising projects 23%
- Training/teaching/coaching 21%

Seven in 10 senior volunteers (69%) donate funds or materials to support the organizations at which they volunteer. Annually they donate an average of $454.

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The information provided in this summary was obtained through research conducted by the Home Instead, Inc. unless otherwise noted.