

Stay Active Through Volunteering

"As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands—one for helping yourself, the other for helping others." — Audrey Hepburn

Volunteerism has been an American value for as long as the country has existed. By enabling individuals of all ages to contribute their time and skills to support others, volunteering benefits both communities and the volunteers themselves. In fact, research has shown that volunteering just a few hours a week can lead to better health in older adults.

Volunteering leads to:

- ▶ Reduction in depression
- ▶ Social connections
- ▶ Lessening of chronic pain and stress
- ▶ Improved mental function

As Americans continue to live longer lives, many are seeking new ways to give back to their communities while finding meaning and purpose. Volunteering enables older adults to accomplish both of these goals.

Getting Started

Older adults can engage in volunteer opportunities in their communities through a variety of organizations. Area Agencies on Aging can connect older adults to meaningful volunteer opportunities and programs in their communities. Volunteers can deliver home-delivered meals to seniors, provide transportation to older adults who can no longer drive, read to young children at local schools, mentor youth, serve as docents at local museums, serve on local government advisory boards—or something entirely different. The possibilities for volunteering are endless.



Volunteering During COVID-19

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteer programs adapted to offer more virtual or physically distant volunteer opportunities. With just a bit of training, older adult volunteers are using the telephone or technology platforms such as Zoom to make wellness calls, engage in intergenerational mentoring or provide Medicare counseling. Guidelines have also been put in place for volunteers to deliver meals and groceries or make porch visits while practicing physical distancing. The continued engagement opportunity that virtual volunteering offers can also help reduce feelings of social isolation and loneliness, which have increased during the pandemic.

Success Story: Calvin

Calvin, 84, joined the Loudoun County Volunteer Program after his wife had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Prior to volunteering, he felt overwhelmed by the challenges of watching his wife's condition deteriorate and serving as her primary caregiver. "During my darkest times, I wondered why this was happening to me and whether I would be able to get through it. Now, as a seasoned volunteer with 19 years under my belt, I understand that I was being tested and prepared for the most important role of my life—helping others. Volunteering gave me a reason to get up in the morning and stimulated my brain as I learned about issues that were completely unfamiliar to me. Currently, I provide older adults with tax assistance and Medicare education support and I can't wait to learn more so I can do even more."

Calvin has remained an active volunteer with the Loudoun County Virginia Insurance Counseling and Assistance Program (VICAP) Medicare Counseling Program during the COVID-19 pandemic. The county provided VICAP volunteers like Calvin with county cell phones and laptops to ensure all VICAP Medicare Part D open enrollment services are provided virtually, safeguarding the health of the volunteers and the Medicare beneficiaries.

Resources

To find volunteer opportunities, including virtual volunteer opportunities, connect with organizations in your community or visit the online resources below.

- Use the Eldercare Locator (eldercare.acl.gov; 800.677.1116) to find a volunteer opportunity through a local Area Agency on Aging.
- Volunteer Match (volunteermatch.org) has a virtual volunteer page (volunteermatch.org/virtual-volunteering) that connects people of all ages with a range of virtual opportunities.
- The America's Natural and Cultural Resources Volunteer Portal (volunteer.gov/s) connects individuals to volunteer opportunities in

local parks and cultural sites and offers some remote opportunities.

- AARP's Create the Good (createthegood.aarp.org/volunteer-ideas/virtual.html) provides connections to virtual volunteer opportunities across the country.
- AARP Foundation's Best Practices Guide for Virtual Volunteers (connect2affect.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/AARP-Foundation-Best-Practices-Guide-for-Virtual-Volunteers-1.pdf) offers tips on how to get started as a virtual volunteer and resources to find opportunities.
- AmeriCorps (americorps.gov) provides a variety of opportunities for people of all ages to get involved in a range of service programs.
- The Red Cross (redcross.org) has a range of volunteer opportunities in which volunteers can engage remotely while supporting the Red Cross mission to help individuals during emergencies.
- The United Way (www.unitedway.org/get-involved/volunteer) connects individuals to local community organizations.
- The Generations United Intergenerational Program Database (www.gu.org) has information on intergenerational volunteer opportunities.
- All for Good (www.allforgood.org) connects potential volunteers to remote volunteer opportunities.

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