

Older Adults and Volunteerism

Ontario Age-Friendly Communities Outreach Program
February 19, 2026



Ontario AFC Outreach Program

- Established in 2015
- Managed by the Centre for Studies in Aging and Health in partnership with Queen's University
- Funded by the Government of Ontario through the [Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility](#)

Ontario
Age-Friendly
Communities



Outreach Program

8 Domains of Age-Friendly Communities

Physical Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Outdoor Spaces & Public Buildings2. Transportation3. Housing
Social Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Social Participation5. Respect & Social Inclusion6. Civic Participation & Employment
Personal Well-being	<ol style="list-style-type: none">7. Communication & Information8. Community Support & Health Services

Impact of Pandemic on Older Volunteers



65% organization report a shortage of volunteers

Loss of 30% - 50% of older adult volunteers:

- Infection control measures
- Transition to virtual programs
- Personal preferences of older adults

(Dumont et al., 2023; Colibaba et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023)

Stakeholder Driven Need

- CSAH hosts and supports the Provincial AFC Outreach Program
- Part of role is conducting an Annual Online Survey and Feedback to individual communities (75) and Regional Networks (4)
- Question arose concerning decline in volunteer engagement and strategies to re-engage volunteers
- Decision to explore developing a guide and inventory of best practices for communities/stakeholders engaging in AFC initiatives

Methodology

- Literature review (August 2023)
- Stakeholders' interviews (14 in November 2023)
- Validation Meeting with Stakeholders/ Community of Interest (COI) (January/March 2024)

Volunteers: Essential Resource

- In 2018, almost 12.7 million people volunteered for charities, non-profits and community organizations – accounting for 41% of Canadians aged 15 and older.
- In 2018, Matures (born 1918-45) (40%) and Baby Boomers (born 1946-65) (31%) were top volunteers, each spending 132 hours or more annually on volunteer activities.
- This large, unpaid, informal workforce of caring Canadians is an asset to the volunteer sector and the country, as individuals reach out to help and support friends, neighbours and those most at risk of health complications.

Community Benefits to Volunteering







Volunteerism and Community Impact

- Volunteering increases social capital – which increases trust and networks which binds a community together
- Volunteers improve the quality of life for people by filling in gaps in services and supporting local causes
- In age-friendly communities, volunteers enable intergenerational bonds, which breaks down barriers

Individual Benefits to Volunteering

<p>Decrease stress levels & depressive symptoms</p> 	<p>Mental & Emotional Health</p>	<p>Gaining knowledge, coping with aging, resilience & respite from caregiving</p> 
<p>Improve psychological stimulation & protect cognitive health</p> 	<p>Bring joy, fulfill needs, self-confidence, self-worth & sense of purpose in life</p> 	<p>Delay progression of Memory Issues & onset of Alzheimer Disease</p> 

Individual Benefits to Volunteering

<p>Increase physical activity & decreases risk of disability</p> 	<p>Physical Health</p>	<p>Improve pain control</p> 
<p>Improve functional abilities & boost well-being</p> 		<p>Decrease risk of inflammation & risk of hypertension</p> 

Individual Benefits to Volunteering

<p>Establish social connections & social integration</p> 	<p>Social Health</p>	<p>Support aging in place</p> 
<p>Build meaningful social relationships</p> 		<p>Provide social support & peer support</p> 

Recruitment Strategies

- Promote Partnership and Collaboration
- Optimize Promotion and Awareness Strategies
- Provide Opportunities for Personal Growth and Motivation
- Create an Age-Friendly, Inclusive and Diverse Recruitment Program
- Ensure Flexible, Affordable, and Accessible Opportunities
- Target Measuring and Opportunities for Specific Groups

Retention Strategies

- Training, Orientation and Education
- Communication and Engagement
- Support and Inclusivity
- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Work Environment and Satisfaction

Recognition

- Respect, purpose and connection
- Personalized appreciation
- Public recognition with consent
- Foster social connection
- Provide growth opportunities
- Peer-to-peer recognition

Thank you!

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- Volunteering Benefits Infographic
- Recruitment Strategies Infographic
- Retention Strategies Infographic

The Power of Volunteerism

Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead