

Health benefits of volunteering

Published in 2007 by the Corporation for National and Community Service, *The Health Benefits of Volunteering* documents major findings for more than 30 rigorous longitudinal studies that reviewed the relationship between health and volunteering. The report particularly emphasizes studies that sought to determine the causal connection between the two factors. The studies, which controlled for other factors, found that volunteering leads to improved physical and mental health, particularly for older adults and those serving 100 hours annually.

Highlights include the following:

- A study of adults ages 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 University 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 age 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 greater longevity.
- Two studies found that the 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 no additional benefits beyond the 100-hour mark.
- States with higher volunteer rates also have better health. There is also a significant statistical relationship between states with higher volunteer rates and lower incidence of mortality and high disease.

Readers can download the full report at www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/07_0506_hbr.pdf or the issue brief at www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/07_0506_hbr_brief.pdf.

Reference

Corporation for National and Community Service. (2007). *The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research*. Washington DC: Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development.