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Ontario Hospital Volunteers: Who they are and what they do

Volunteers at hospitals in Ontario contributed an average of 101 hours each per year, according to research done for the International Year of Volunteers (details about the project on page 2). Who are these volunteers, what do they do, and how do they help?

Who are Ontario's hospital volunteers?

Hospital volunteers in Ontario are more likely to be female, middle-aged or older, and not in the labour force.

- Women make up 55% of all volunteers in Ontario,¹ but 74% of volunteers in the Ontario hospitals in this study.
- Over half (57%) of Ontario hospital volunteers were over the age of 54.
- While just over half (55%) of all Ontario volunteers are employed full-time, 75% of Ontario hospital volunteers were not in the labour force; 49% were retired.

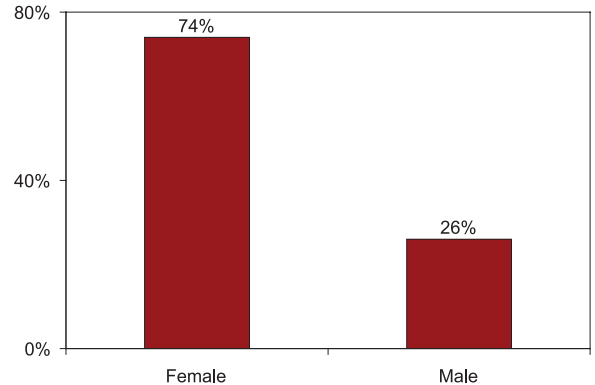
Over half (55%) of all volunteers in Ontario have a post-secondary certificate or diploma or university degree, but only 34% of Ontario hospital volunteers had similar qualifications. (See figure on page 2.)

What Ontario hospital volunteers do

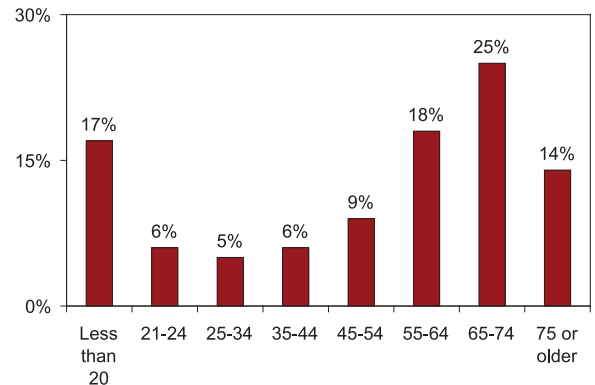
The activities most commonly performed by volunteers in the Ontario hospitals studied were:

- Accompanying patients on outings.
- Providing companionship and friendly visiting on a one-to-one basis.
- Providing support to patients and families in waiting rooms.
- Providing support at clinics, support groups, etc.
- Helping with recreational programs.
- Shopping and doing errands.
- Taking patients from one facility to another within the site.
- Assisting with administrative functions.

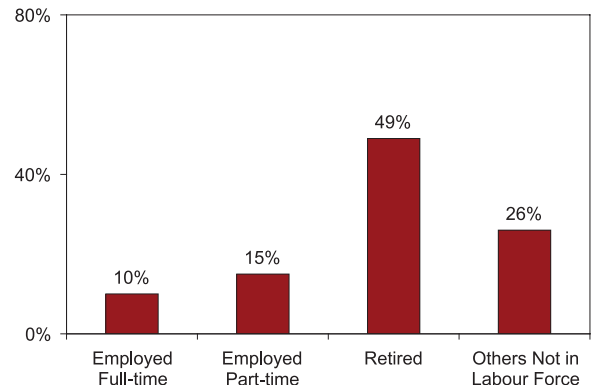
Percentage of Ontario's Hospital Volunteers, by Gender



Percentage of Ontario's Hospital Volunteers, by Age



Percentage of Ontario's Hospital Volunteers, by Labour Force Status



Supply and demand

Nearly half (46%) of the hospitals studied reported a shortage of adult volunteers, whose greater life experience contributes directly to quality of patient care.

The majority of hospitals (90%) had enough, or more than enough, student volunteers, who often help with clerical and computer-related duties.

The majority of hospitals (52%) reported a decline in long-term volunteers (those who remain with the hospital for five years or more) and an 81% increase in short-term volunteers (those who remain for between three months and one year); 63% reported an increase in volunteers requesting assignments of less than three months.

The situation for middle-term volunteers (those who have stayed with the hospital for between one and five years) was more stable. Fifty-five percent of hospitals reported an increase in these volunteers, 13% reported a decrease, and 32% reported no change.

Benefits to hospitals

Hospital volunteers:

- Contribute to the quality of patient care.
- Ease the workload of hospital staff.
- Donate to hospitals where they volunteer (86% of hospitals reported that nearly half of their volunteers were also donors).
- Raise the profile of the hospital in the community.

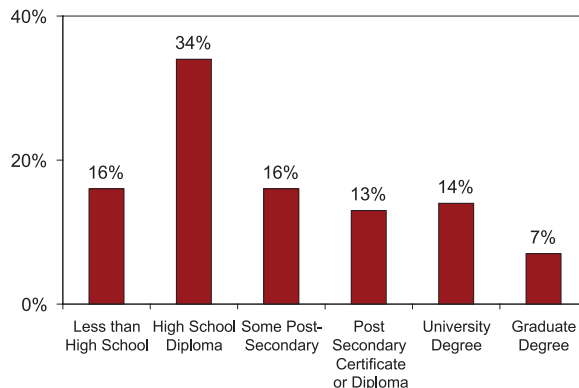
¹ Findings for all Ontario volunteers are from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, which asked Canadians aged 15 and older about their charitable giving and volunteering behaviour over the one-year period from October 1, 1999 to September 30, 2000.

For more information on the International Year of Volunteers, visit www.nonprofitscan.ca.

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Percentage of Ontario's Hospital Volunteers, by Education



Benefits to volunteers

On a scale of 1-10, Ontario hospital volunteers rated their satisfaction with their hospital experience at 8.7. The benefits they valued most were:

- Learning new things.
- Making social contacts.
- Obtaining references for employment.
- Job and career opportunities.

Background on the research process

This project surveyed 31 hospitals in Metro Toronto and the regions of Durham, Peel and York that each had at least 100 volunteers. Two-thirds were acute and general hospitals. The rest provided long-term care, rehabilitation, or psychiatric and other services. The number of volunteers at each site ranged from 125 to 3,240 with an average of 700 volunteers per site.

For more information

An in-depth analysis of the results of this research project is available free online. Go to www.nonprofitscan.ca to download *Costs and Contributions from Professional Volunteers: Lessons from Ontario's Hospitals*, and *Hospital Volunteers: An Important and Changing Resource*.

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