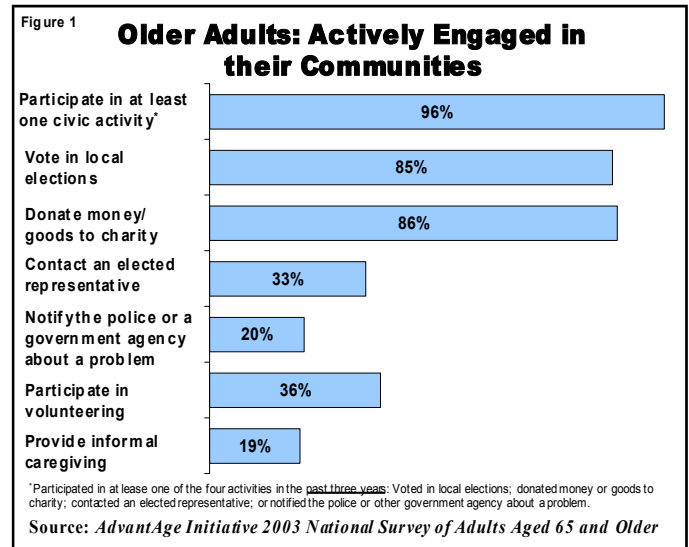


Older people contribute to their communities in many ways, such as participating in civic affairs through voting in local elections and other activities, making donations of money or goods to charity, and engaging in productive activities such as volunteering or caregiving. The *AdvantAge Initiative 2003 National Survey of Adults Aged 65 and Older* finds that nearly all (96%) seniors participated in at least one civic activity<sup>1</sup> in the past three years. Over one third (36%), or more than 12 million adults age 65 and older in the U.S., are engaged in some kind of volunteer work. One of five (19%), or more than six million adults age 65 and older in the U.S., provide caregiving to a relative or friend.

Older adults, with their wealth of knowledge and life experience, constitute an important social and economic resource for communities across the United States. At the same time, engagement in civic and productive activities provides an opportunity for older adults to contribute to their community, remain socially active and intellectually stimulated, retain a sense of personal control, and in the process, enhance their own health and well being.<sup>2</sup>



An elder friendly community recognizes and appreciates the contributions of their older residents and provides plentiful and diverse opportunities for older people to stay involved in community life.

## CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

Older adults across the U.S. are civically engaged (Figure 1). The vast majority (85%) of community dwelling elders voted in their local elections, nearly nine of ten (86%) made a donation of money or goods to charity, one third (33%) contacted their elected representative in the past three years, and one of five (20%) notified the police or other government agency about a problem.

## HELPING OTHERS

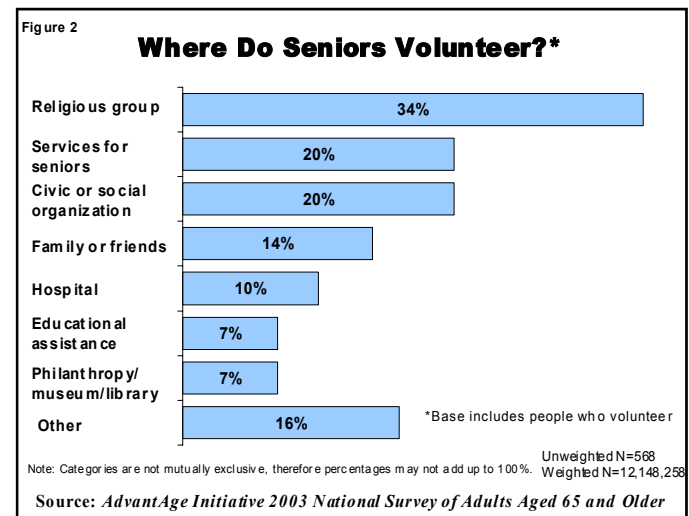
### Older adults devote millions of hours each week to volunteering...

Older people who volunteer donate their time to a variety of organizations in their communities (Figure 2). Nearly all (99%) volunteers report engaging in more than one volunteer activity (not shown).

Older volunteers devote a substantial number of hours each week to their cause (not shown). Among those who volunteer:

- 46% spend five or more hours per week in volunteer activities;
- 48% contribute less than five hours per week;

- 6% percent of respondents could not assess how many hours they volunteer.
- The mean amount of time spent volunteering is seven hours per week. This is equivalent to approximately **84 million hours per week** that older volunteers across the U.S. contribute to their community.



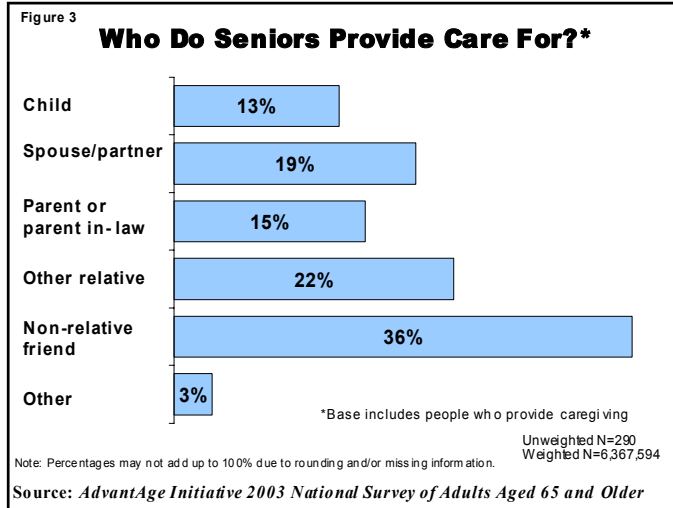
<sup>1</sup>Participated in at least one of the following four activities in the past three years: voted in local elections; donated money or goods to charity; contacted an elected representative; or notified the police or other government agency about a problem.

<sup>2</sup>R Rowe and RL Kahn. *Successful Aging*. 1998. New York: Pantheon Books. Also see: The Relation Between Everyday Activities and Successful Aging: A 6-Year Longitudinal Study. VH Menec. *Journal of Gerontology: SOCIAL SCIENCES*. 2003; 58(2), S74-S82.



**... and providing care to family and friends**

Because access to affordable formal care is often limited, help provided by unpaid family members or friends has become increasingly important. The survey finds that one of five (19%) older Americans provide help or care to a relative or friend who is unable to do some things for themselves due to illness or disability (Figure 1). More than one third (36%) of those who provide care, do so for a non-relative friend (Figure 3).



Older caregivers dedicate a substantial number of hours each week to helping their family or friends (not shown). Among those who provide care:

- 24% devote more than 10 hours per week;
- 28% four to ten hours;
- 37% one to three hours;
- 12% could not assess how many hours they spend on caregiving.

The mean number of hours of those who provide caregiving is 20 hours per week. This is equivalent to approximately **120 million hours per week** that older adults across the U.S. dedicate to caring for family or friends. Nearly half (46%) of those who provide care have done so for more than three years.

**STAYING INVOLVED: GOOD FOR THE COMMUNITY, GOOD FOR THE INDIVIDUAL**

Older adults who stay engaged in community life differ from those who do not in several important ways. Involved seniors are more likely to perceive themselves as being in good to excellent health; to have a large social network with many friends living nearby; to engage in social, religious, and cultural activities; and to perceive a sense of personal control in the community (Table 1).

**Table 1. Differences in Health and Social Characteristics Between Elders Who Stay Engaged in the Community and Those Who Do Not**

Characteristics	Participates in:					
	Civic Affairs <sup>1</sup>		Volunteering		Caregiving	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Health Status: excellent/very good/good <sup>2</sup>	77%	47%	83%	71%	82%	74%
Friends in the neighborhood: many/nearly all	41	23	48	36	43	40
Engaged in all three social activities in the past week <sup>3</sup>	27	5	39	18	32	27
Feel in control of making their neighborhood a better place to live <sup>4</sup>	68	38	79	59	74	65

Source: *AdvantAge Initiative 2003 National Survey of Adults Aged 65 and Older*

<sup>1</sup>Engaged in at least one of the following four civic activities in the past three years: Voted in local elections; donated money or goods to charity; contacted an elected representative; or notified the police or other government agency about a problem.

<sup>2</sup>Self reported.

<sup>3</sup>Engaged in all three of the following activities in the week prior to the survey: (1) Went to church, temple, or another place of worship for services or other activity; (2) Went to a movie, play, concert, restaurant, sporting event, club meeting, card game, or other social activity; and (3) Got together with friends or neighbors in any other setting.

<sup>4</sup>The survey question asked: "How much influence do you think people like yourself can have in making this neighborhood a better place to live?" The response choices were: "A lot," "Some," "Not very much," or "None." Those who responded "A lot" or "Some" were considered as feeling "in control."

The *AdvantAge Initiative 2003 National Survey of Adults Aged 65 and Older*, a random digit dial (RDD) telephone survey conducted by International Communications Research (ICR) from April 16, 2003, to June 22, 2003, consisted of 30 to 35 minute telephone interviews in English and Spanish with a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized adults age 65 years and older. The study oversampled non-institutionalized African Americans and Latinos aged 65 and older, and adults aged 85 and older. The final data were weighted to the parameters of the adult population aged 65 and older using the U.S. Census Bureau's March 2002 Current Population Survey (CPS) to produce representative results for the 33,575,435 non-institutionalized adults aged 65 and older in the 48 contiguous states in the United States.

The AdvantAge Initiative National Survey was supported by the Atlantic Philanthropies, Inc.

For additional information contact the AdvantAge Initiative at: [advantageinitiative@vnsny.org](mailto:advantageinitiative@vnsny.org)

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The Center for Home Care Policy and Research is an independent research center within the Visiting Nurse Service of New York and the only provider-based research organization in the nation focusing on home health care policy. Its mission is to promote the delivery of high quality, cost-effective care in the home and community, and support informed decision making by policy makers, managers, practitioners, and consumers of home and community based services.

