

Making a Difference [1]

Many times people who have dealt with cancer firsthand want to support others with cancer. Whether you are a cancer survivor or a family member or friend of someone living with cancer, you have a lot of valuable experience that can help others facing cancer. Becoming a volunteer makes an important difference in someone else's life and often makes a positive difference in your own life. Being a volunteer offers different rewards for everyone. In fact, many volunteers say sharing their time makes them feel good, helps to build new friendships, and widens their network of support.

Getting started

Once you've made the decision to become a volunteer, think about your own interests, strengths, and areas of expertise and how various organizations could use these to help further their mission. Cancer-related organizations provide different types of opportunities for volunteering:

Service and support. These programs provide information and help people with cancer find ways to cope.

- Telephone hotlines. As a hotline counselor, you are trained to give easy-to-understand information over the telephone and lend support by listening to patients' concerns. Get a list of [telephone and e-mail cancer helplines](#) [2].
- Cancer survivors or volunteer counselors lead some support groups for people with cancer. Offer to co-lead or start your own cancer support group.
- Cancer support programs. These programs may offer emotional and practical support to patients and their families by providing needed items, such as wigs, scarves, breast forms, and books. Other types of support include help with medical services, such as referrals for second opinions or specialists, legal services, and rides to medical appointments. Learn more about organizations that provide [support buddies](#) [3].

Awareness and education. Through workshops and presentations at schools, workplaces, health fairs, and on the Internet, cancer organizations raise awareness about cancer and educate people about cancer prevention and screening. Many also provide tips about maintaining a healthy lifestyle and follow-up care after treatment ends. Here's how you can help:

- Learn how to teach a session about cancer at your workplace, community center, or place of worship.

- Provide office services at your local cancer organization to help with event planning and logistics.
- Join a committee that plans new educational programs.

Fundraising. Cancer organizations usually need to raise money to maintain services and programs for patients, such as free cancer screenings, transportation assistance and financial aid for patients and their families, outreach programs, education, and research. Consider participating in fundraising activities, such as races and other sporting events (such as golf tournaments), luncheons or dinners, plays or concerts, fashion shows, and auctions.

Advocacy. Being an advocate means supporting and speaking in favor of a specific cause. You can help lead a local or even national effort to develop or change cancer policy issues. Cancer organizations advocate by changing public policy, such as issues of access to health care and funding for cancer research, supporting legislation that helps people with cancer and their families, and speaking out about issues affecting people with cancer. Learn more about being a cancer advocate [4].

Finding volunteer opportunities

Here are some suggestions on how to find volunteer opportunities in your community:

- Tell your family, friends, coworkers, and health care providers that you want to get involved in cancer-related volunteer activities. Talk with them about your interests and ways you think you can help, and ask for their ideas about how you can volunteer.
- Find out about local volunteer programs where you live by contacting your local hospital or cancer center, senior centers, associations, clubs, and places of worship to learn about their cancer volunteer programs and how you can get involved.
- Check your local newspaper, library, community center, and supermarket bulletin board for volunteer opportunities.
- Contact a cancer-related group [5] that interests you. Cancer organizations provide the following types of programs that often rely on the help of volunteers.

Helping people with cancer cope with everyday life

Keep in mind that you do not have to join an organization to make a difference in the life of someone with cancer. Sometimes, people find that the simple act of helping family members, friends, or acquaintances in the community with everyday tasks brings joy and satisfaction. Here are some ways to help:

- Offer to bring a meal, run an errand, care for a pet, go to the supermarket, or do household or yard chores.
- Help someone get ready for appointments by making a list of questions to ask the doctor [6].
- Drive someone to the appointments and offer to wait and drive the person home afterwards.
- Help someone find more information about his or her specific disease. The cancer types [7] on Cancer.Net are a good place to start.
- Offer to share with someone who has a similar diagnosis about the treatment choices you made and why, if the person seems interested.
- Use your experience to help patients feel comfortable talking about their concerns with their

doctors.

- Listen to and acknowledge someone's concerns and provide reassurance if you feel comfortable doing so.

More Information

[Advocacy and Policy](#) [8]

[Caregiving](#) [9]

Additional Resources

[Conquer Cancer Foundation](#) [10]

[American Cancer Society: Get Involved](#) [11]

[National Cancer Institute: Facing Forward: Ways You Can Make a Difference in Cancer](#) [12]

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Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/survivorship/making-difference>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24698>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24526>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24403>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25325>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/diagnosing-cancer>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/23>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25009>

[10] <http://www.conquercancerfoundation.org/>

[11] <http://www.cancer.org/Involved/index?level=0>

[12] <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/make-a-difference/page1>