



**Learn About**  
CAREERS  
IN AGING

**BRIGHT FUTURE.  
MANY POSSIBILITIES.**

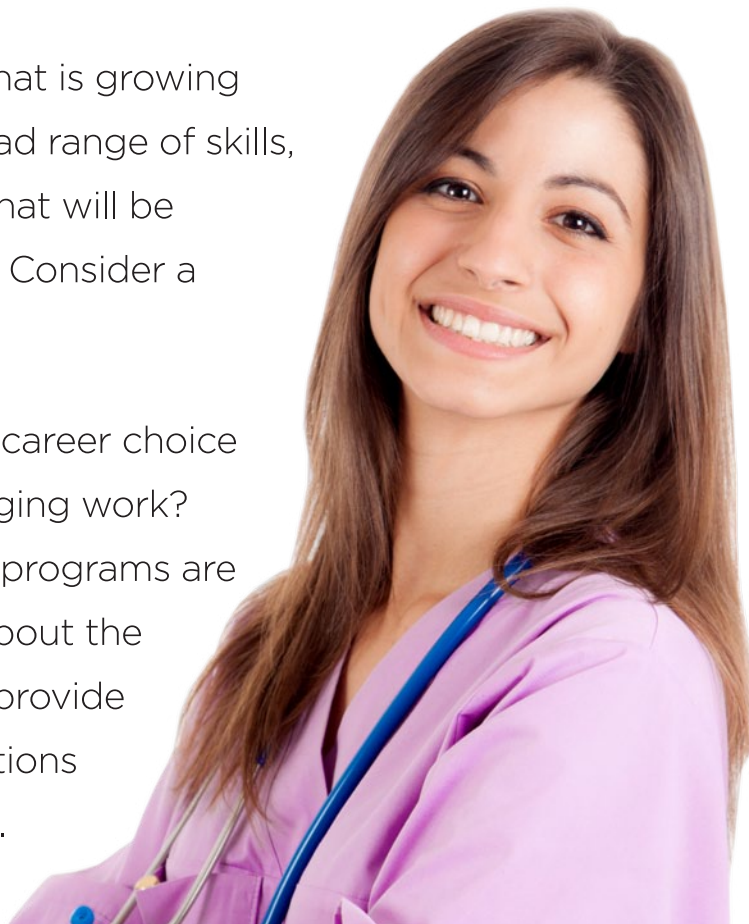
*I ♥ my job*

# Table of CONTENTS

- 3 What is Gerontology? Geriatrics?
- 4 Why Aging?
- 5 What Job and Career Opportunities Are Available?
- 6 How Do You Become a Professional in Aging?
- 7 How Do You Select a Program in Aging?
- 8 How Can You Find Out More About the Field of Aging?
- 9 Contact Information for National Aging Organizations and Government Agencies
- 10 Is Aging the Field for You?

Are you looking for a job in an area that is growing rapidly, that needs people with a broad range of skills, that will improve people's lives, and that will be exciting, challenging, and rewarding? Consider a career in the field of aging!

Is the field of gerontology a possible career choice for you? Where do professionals in aging work? What do they do? What educational programs are available? How can you learn more about the field? We hope that this booklet will provide the answers to these and other questions you may have about careers in aging.



### **What is Gerontology? Geriatrics?**

Aging is a multidisciplinary field. This means that the study of aging combines or integrates information from several separate areas of study. Biology, sociology, and psychology are the “core” or basic areas, along with content from many other areas of study such as public policy, humanities, social sciences, and economics.

**Gerontology** is the study of the aging process and individuals as they grow from middle age through later life. It includes (a) the study of physical, mental, and social changes in older people as they age; (b) the investigation of the changes in society resulting from our aging population; and (c) the application of this knowledge to policies and programs. As a result of the multidisciplinary focus of gerontology, professionals from diverse fields call themselves “gerontologists.”

**Geriatrics** is (a) the study of health and disease in later life and (b) the comprehensive health care of older persons and the well-being of their informal caregivers.

# Why Aging?

## **Expanding Career Opportunities**

Populations are aging worldwide. People are living longer and the number of older persons is increasing. Nearly half of Americans born in 1900 died before they were 50 years old. People born today can expect to live beyond their 75th year. The age group growing fastest in our society and in many other countries is the “very old,” people aged 85 and older.

The growth of the elderly population will continue into the future. By the middle of the 21st century, 1 in 5 Americans will be over 65, and there will be 15 to 18 million persons over the age of 85. These growth trends will result in a demand for professionals with knowledge and expertise in aging. Expanded career opportunities in gerontology and geriatrics are forecast in many disciplines and professions.

## **A Stimulating and Challenging Field**

The field of aging is very diverse, offering many different employment opportunities. This diversity exists, in part, because older persons are very different from each other in many ways. As we age, our experiences, needs, resources, and abilities vary according to factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, and economic status.

For example, many older persons are very healthy and active. Persons working with these older adults might provide educational opportunities, recreation and leisure programs, and volunteer activities.

Some older persons are frail and less active. Jobs which relate to these more vulnerable elders might be in long-term care, other health care settings or in agencies that deliver services to older persons.

The relative newness of the field means that there are opportunities for innovative ideas and new programs and products. Many people have started their own businesses, such as coordinating home health care or consulting with businesses and corporations about how to develop services or design products that would benefit older adults.

## **Multidisciplinary Opportunities**

The varied needs of older persons lead to exciting opportunities for working side by side with professionals from other disciplines.

As a service provider, you may be coordinating information with housing agencies, lawyers, transportation providers, nurses, and family counselors. As a health professional, you might serve on a health care team providing hospital care, day care, or home care to older persons. As an educator, you might teach college courses related to the sociology or psychology of aging or provide educational classes for older adults on retirement. As a researcher, you might study the relationships between the strength of friendship networks and life satisfaction among older adults.

## **Potential to Make a Difference**

People working in aging report great satisfaction in addressing the challenges of those who are growing older; helping to maintain the quality of their lives; and enjoying the wit, wisdom, and creativity of the older persons with whom they come into contact.

As a student you may be required to complete a practicum, internship or a service-learning experience or you may have some extra time and want to volunteer. Through these experiences you can make a difference!

Your community can benefit from volunteer work you do with older persons. You will have an opportunity to influence positively the agencies and organizations serving older persons and the legislation and policies that affect their lives.

# What Job and Career Opportunities Are Available?

Professionals in the field of aging work in a variety of settings. These include:

- Community, human services, and religious organizations
- Health care and long-term care institutions
- Federal, state, and local government agencies, including the aging network (the system of service delivery to older adults established by a federal law entitled the Older Americans Act)
- Schools (e.g. working with grandparents who are raising their grandchildren)
- Retirement communities
- Academic and other education and research settings
- Professional organizations
- Business and industry

Some professionals work directly with older adults. Their activities may include:

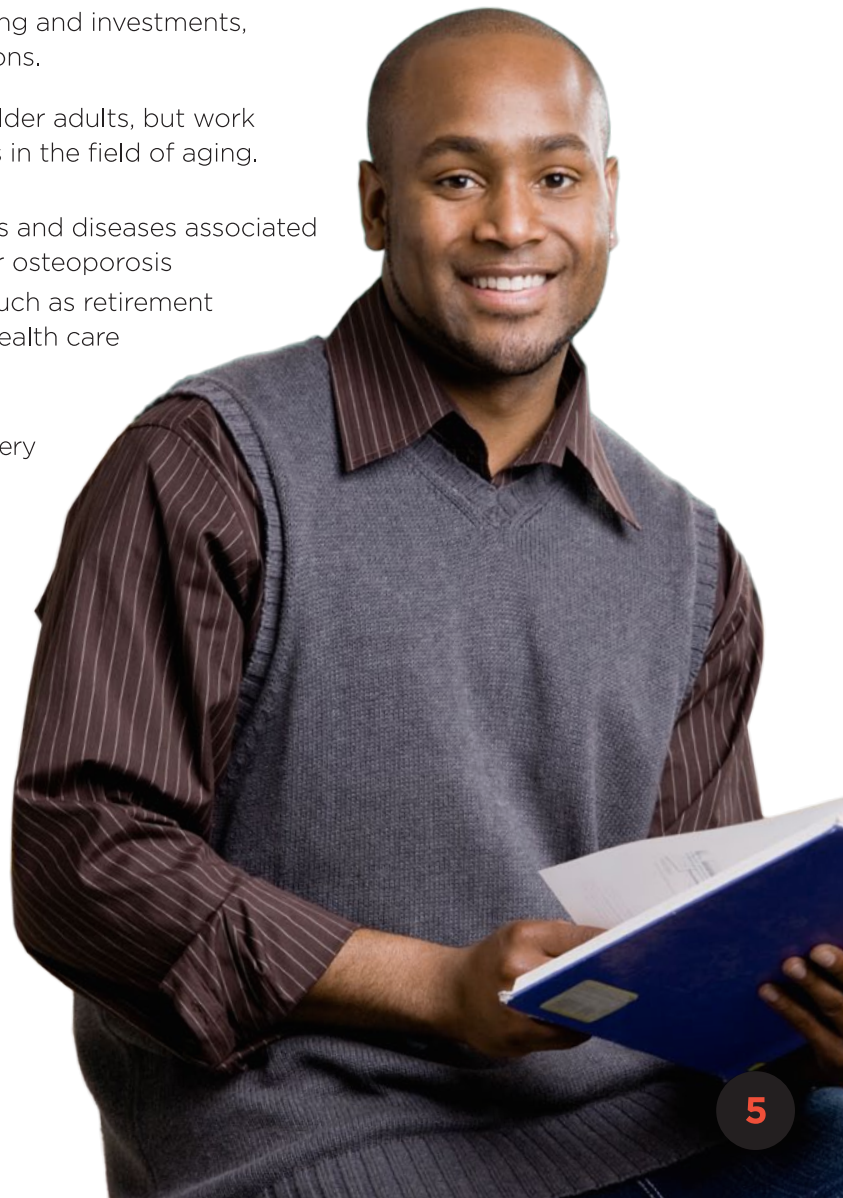
- Developing programs such as health promotion, senior theater groups, intergenerational activities and leisure and recreation for older adults
- Providing direct care to frail, ill, or impaired older adults in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, and adult day care or home care programs
- Counseling older adults and their families about issues of caregiving, employment, death and dying, or mental health
- Advising older clients about estate planning and investments, financing long-term care, or housing options.

Other professionals are less directly involved with older adults, but work on their behalf, educate others, or investigate issues in the field of aging.

Examples of their activities include:

- Conducting research on the aging process and diseases associated with aging, such as Alzheimer's disease or osteoporosis
- Analyzing issues related to older adults, such as retirement opportunities, income maintenance, the health care system, and housing alternatives
- Planning, administering, and evaluating community-based services and service delivery systems for older adults
- Teaching courses on aging to college and university students, health care professionals, and older adults
- Advocating with or on behalf of older adults before legislative bodies or in institutional settings
- Designing products to meet the special interests and needs of older persons
- Advising business, industry, and labor regarding older workers and consumers

Some professionals devote themselves full-time to the field of aging; others divide their time between aging and other interests within their disciplinary, professional, or clinical areas.



# How Do You Become a Professional in Aging?

There are three educational avenues to becoming a professional in the field of aging. The first two involve enrolling in a formal credit program at a college or university.

Some students choose aging as a specialty area by enrolling in a minor or certificate program in aging within one of the traditional disciplines or professions (e.g., anthropology, architecture, biology, political science, psychology, sociology, medicine, nursing, social work, health-related professions)

Others opt for a degree or major in gerontology or aging studies

For those seeking formal training in aging, there are more than 500 colleges and universities that offer more than 1,000 credit programs in aging. Over 1,000 additional schools offer course work and adult or continuing education programs that provide information on aging to older adults and others in community for personal use and/or upgrading specific skills.

Instruction in gerontology is available at all educational levels.

## **Associate Level**

Community college programs train people through specific courses in gerontology and skill-training experiences. The courses can lead to an AA degree or a certificate or emphasis in gerontology. Credits can usually be used toward a four-year degree. Students in these education and training programs generally seek entry-level jobs or advancement in their current employment.

## **Bachelor's Level**

Many colleges and universities offer a major or bachelor's degree in gerontology or a certificate, minor, or specialization in aging to complement a traditional academic major. A field experience is usually required. Graduates are qualified for entry-level or mid-level jobs as practitioners and planners in local and state agencies offering programs and services to older adults.

## **Master's Level**

Nearly 100 universities offer a master's degree in gerontology. Master's-level training prepares professionals to become skilled administrators, planners, and practitioners. Many universities offer graduate specializations, which permit students to major in another academic or clinical field while specializing in aging.

## **Doctoral Level**

Some universities offer doctoral-level specialization in aging within other academic and clinical departments. A limited number of universities offer a PhD in gerontology or aging studies. Doctoral programs prepare students for careers in research, teaching, administration, or clinical practice.

## **Postdoctoral Level**

Postdoctoral training programs or fellowships are available in gerontology and geriatrics. Many of these are funded through federal agencies and can be completed in academic or clinical settings.

For some, continuing education is the logical choice. Non-credit programs may be designed for those preparing for new careers, for people already working who want additional knowledge about aging, or for individuals seeking to enrich their lives.

Continuing education is offered by colleges and universities, professional and aging associations, hospitals, training firms, and businesses. In some professions, such as social work, counseling, and nursing, continuing education is required to maintain a license or certificate.

# How Do You Select a Program in Aging?

For a list of the schools that offer programs in aging, consult the Directory of Educational Programs in Gerontology and Geriatrics (published by the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education) or, for a modest charge, have AGHE perform a personalized search of its Database on Gerontology in Higher Education. Contact the AGHE office for more information about these resources.

There is no accreditation of educational programs in the field of aging. Many programs, however, follow national standards and guidelines developed by AGHE.

After you have selected several schools that interest you, contact the faculty members who direct those educational programs. Ask them what their graduates are doing. If they have found jobs in settings that interest you, consider the program as a good option for yourself.

## **How Do You Locate Jobs in the Field of Aging?**

Field placements, internships, and professional affiliations, which are required by many college and university programs in aging, often lead to permanent employment. Some national organizations and federal agencies, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs, offer these opportunities with stipends.

Volunteering at community agencies provides work experience as well as a network of contacts that is extremely helpful for finding employment in the field. In some instances, a student's volunteer work can become a paid position upon graduation.

Become familiar with the state and local agencies and organizations that serve older persons. This information can be obtained from your state unit or area agency on aging. Also contact local hospitals, nursing homes, senior centers, and retirement communities.

University centers, institutes on aging, and faculty members teaching in gerontology programs can be helpful because they often receive notices of job openings in the local area.

Become involved in one or more professional aging organizations and attend their annual meetings. Jobs may be listed and résumés distributed at job fairs. Informal networking at these meetings is an excellent way to learn about available positions. Newsletters of some organizations list job openings and career opportunities. And don't forget the classified ads in local newspapers and employment search engines.

Jobs listings may not be found under "G" for gerontology. Also look under the type of work you want to do (e.g., program planner, social worker, nurse, speech therapist, recreation director, housing administrator, etc.). A great resource for gerontology and geriatric jobs is [www.agework.com](http://www.agework.com).



# How Can You Find Out More About the Field of Aging?

1. Take an introductory gerontology course.
2. Talk to people who are working in the field of aging. Ask them why they chose this field, what they do, and how they like their work.
3. Volunteer in senior center, a nursing home, or on a faculty member's research project in aging.
4. Read publications in the field of aging, such as *The Gerontologist*, published by The Gerontological Society of America; *Generations*, published by the American Society on Aging; *Innovations*, published by The National Council on the Aging and AGHE's sponsored journal, *The Journal of Gerontology and Geriatrics Education* (see contact information on page 9).
5. Find out what events you can attend on campus. Some colleges and universities have gerontology clubs for students interested in aging. Campus gerontology programs often sponsor lectures, workshops, other educational programs, and opportunities to volunteer with older adults.
6. Attend meetings of regional, state, or national organizations where professionals and students in the field present papers and discuss important issues. Student volunteers are often recruited to help at these meetings in return for free registration. Many times the journals, newsletters, and websites of these organizations include calendars of such events.
7. Contact discipline specific professional organizations – such as The American Counseling Association, National Association of Social Workers, American Public Health Association, American Occupational Therapy Association, American Anthropological Association, American Psychological Association, and American Sociological Association – which have sections on aging that publish newsletters and/or sponsor sessions at their annual meetings.
8. Get more information from government agencies such as the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Institute on Aging (see contact information on page 9) that publish a variety of interesting demographic profiles and other information about the older population and its subgroups.
9. Contact your state unit or area agency on aging about what meetings or publications might be available concerning local programs and activities for older adults.
10. Consider contacting these additional national aging organizations and government agencies on page 9.





**AARP**

[www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)  
800.424.3410

**LeadingAge**

[www.leadingage.org](http://www.leadingage.org)  
202.783.2242

**American Geriatrics Society (AGS)**

[www.americangeriatrics.org](http://www.americangeriatrics.org)  
212.308.1414

**American Society of Aging (ASA)**

[www.asaging.org](http://www.asaging.org)  
415.974.9600

**National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (N4A)**

[www.N4A.org](http://www.N4A.org)  
202.872.0888

**National Association of States United for Aging & Disabilities (NASUAD)**

[www.nasuad.org](http://www.nasuad.org)  
202.898.2578

**National Caucus and Center on Black Aged (NCBA)**

[www.ncba-aged.org](http://www.ncba-aged.org)  
202.637.8400

**National Council on the Aging (NCOA)**

[www.ncoa.org](http://www.ncoa.org)  
202.479.1200

**National Hispanic Council on Aging (NHCOA)**

[www.nhcoa.org](http://www.nhcoa.org)  
202.347.9733

**National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA)**

[www.nicoa.org](http://www.nicoa.org)  
505.292.2001

**National Institute on Aging (NIA)**

[www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov)  
301.496.1752

**Older Women's League (OWL)**

[www.owl-national.org](http://www.owl-national.org)  
877.653.7966

**The Gerontological Society of America (GSA)**

[www.geron.org](http://www.geron.org)  
202.842.1275

**U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA)**

[www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)  
202.619.0724

**U.S. Census Bureau Population Division**

Aging Studies Branch  
[www.census.gov/popest](http://www.census.gov/popest)  
301.763.4636



# Is Aging the Field for You?

To begin to find the answer to this question, ask yourself if you are interested in improving the lives of older people. Are you interested in knowing more about your own aging and the changes to expect in your family members as they grow older? Talk with professionals and students in the field. Discuss your future plans with your academic advisor.

Whether or not you choose a career in aging, the knowledge you gain will serve you well as a decision maker, service provider, planner, business professional, consumer, family member, and informed citizen.

Our society's success in responding to the opportunities and challenges presented by an aging population and the interests and needs of older persons will depend in large part on the dedication of those who choose to work in the field of aging. We hope that you will join us!

## **Association for Gerontology in Higher Education**

The Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE), the educational unit of The Gerontological Society of America, was founded in 1974 to advance the study of gerontology in institutions of higher education. Institutional members of AGHE include colleges, universities, and organizations that are committed to gerontological education, training, and research. Through its activities, programs, publications, and services, AGHE advocates for, and facilitates the development of, quality educational opportunities in aging. Visit us at [aghe.org](http://aghe.org).

## **The Gerontological Society of America**

The Gerontological Society of America is the oldest and largest multidisciplinary scientific organization devoted to the advancement of aging research. Its membership includes more than 5,400 researchers, educators, practitioners, and other professionals. The Society's principal mission is to promote research and education in aging and to encourage their dissemination to others. Visit us at [geron.org](http://geron.org).

## **The Careers in Aging Project**

This booklet is an updated version of the introductory booklet on careers in aging, written primarily for high school and college students, that was been published as a result of AGHE's Careers in Aging Project. The Careers in Aging Project was made possible by grants from the AARP Foundation. We would like to thank the Foundation and the individuals who contributed to the success of the project: Pauline Abbott, EdD (California State University, Fullerton); Alexander Bucur (University of California, Los Angeles); Gloria D. Heinemann, PhD (VA Western New York Healthcare System, University of Buffalo, SUNY); Anne S. Kahl (deceased); Jane E. Myers, PhD (Department of Counseling and Educational Development, University of North Carolina at Greensboro); David Peterson, PhD (Andrus Gerontology Center, University of Southern California); Susan Shoho (California State University, Fullerton). The authors of this introductory booklet are: Gloria D. Heinemann, PhD, VA Western New York Healthcare System and University of Buffalo, SUNY; Elizabeth B. Douglass, University of Maryland Baltimore County; Joy Lobenstine Whittington, Atlanta, GA.



For more information on Careers in Aging,  
go to [careersinaging.com](http://careersinaging.com).

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