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Young Volunteers, Big Opportunity

Statistics Canada, Tables 45-10-0039-01 and 45-10-0040-01 · Released November 2025

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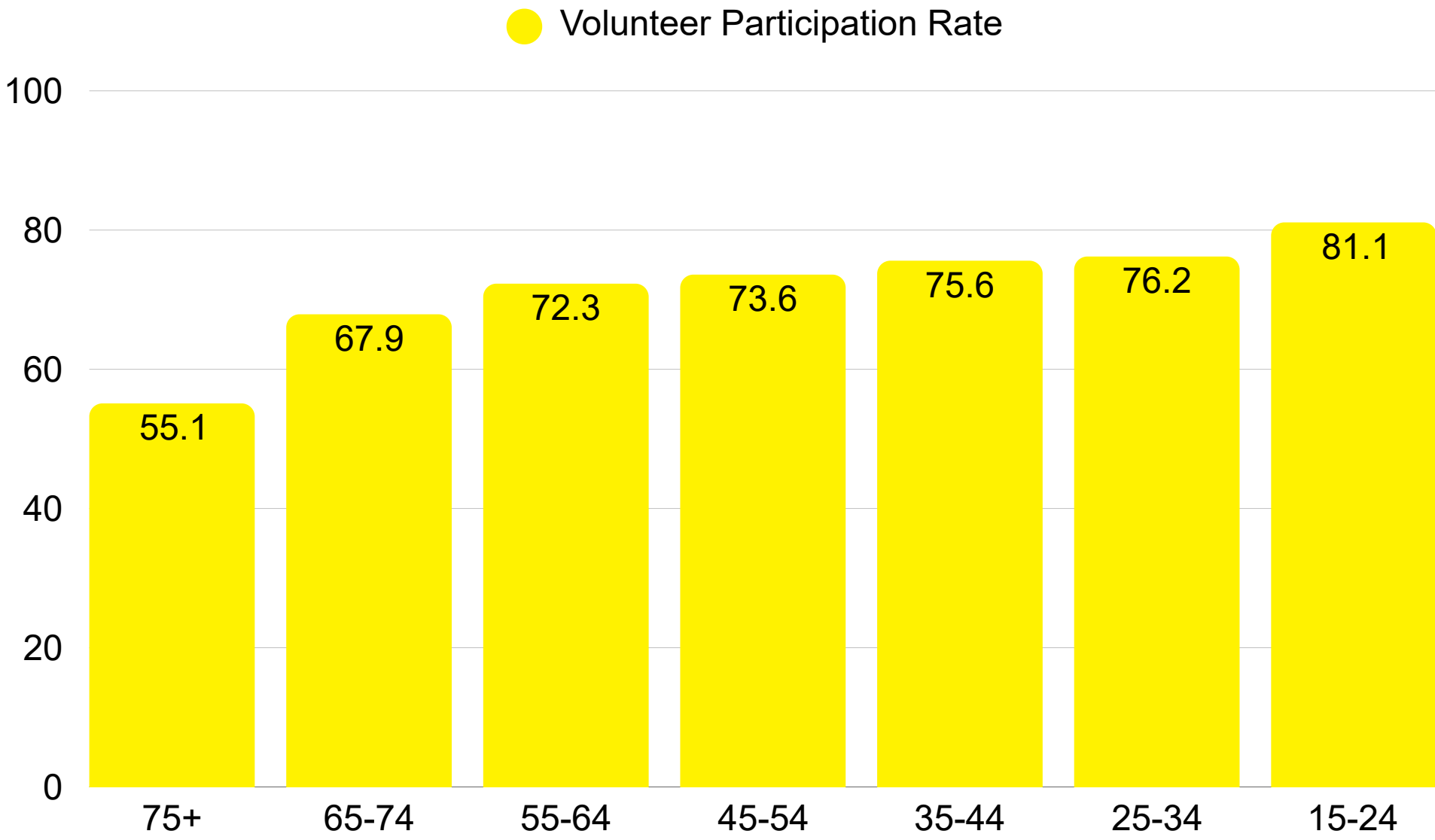
Canada

The starting point

Youth are the most likely age group to volunteer in Canada

Overall volunteer participation rate by age group · Canada · 2023



81.1%

15–24 years

Highest of any age group

76.2%

25–34 years

Second highest

72.8%

National average

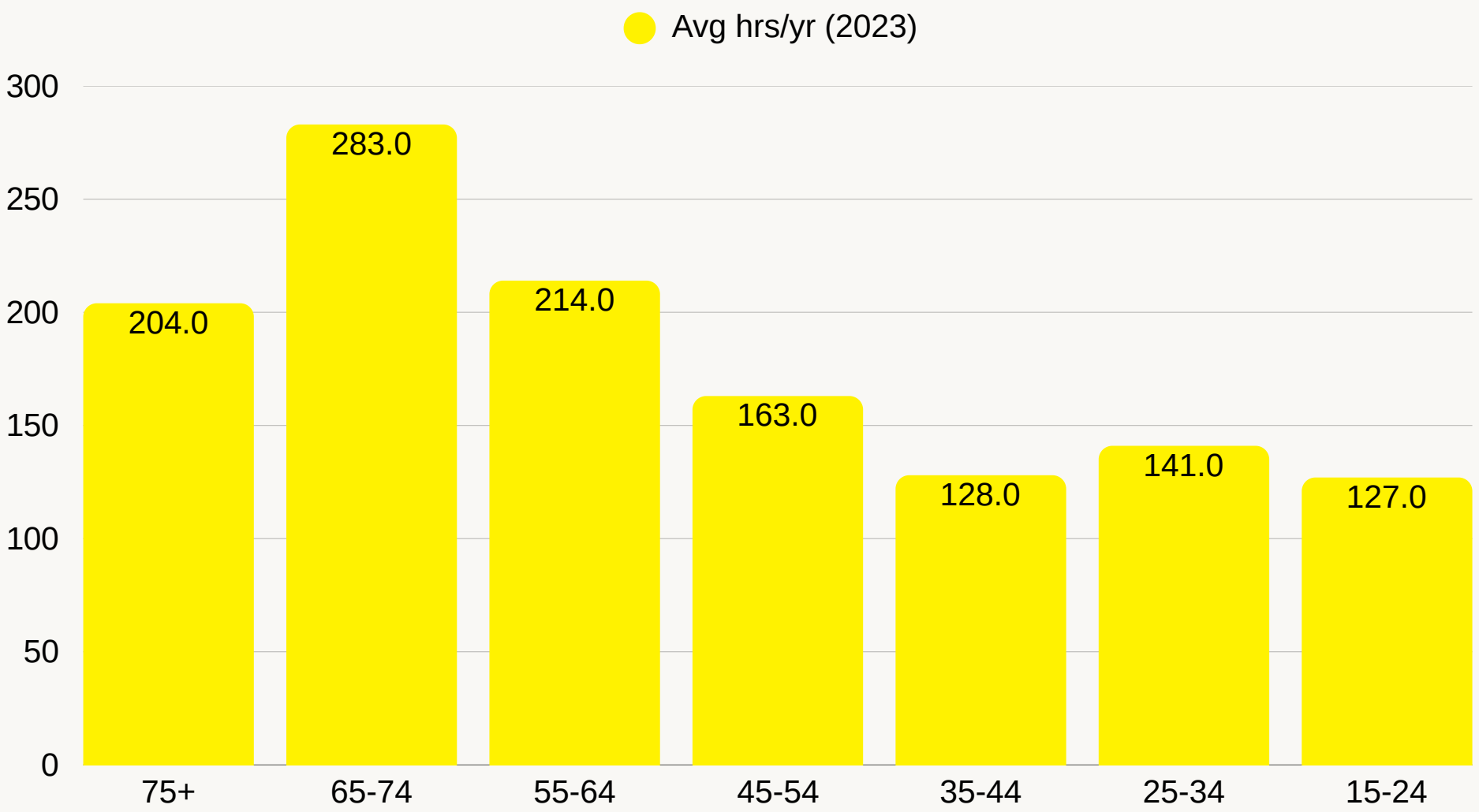
All ages combined

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Tables 45-10-0039-01 and 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

The hours gap

Participation rate and hours per volunteer are two very different measures

Average annual volunteer hours per volunteer by age group · Canada · 2023



127 hrs
15–24 avg/yr
Lowest of any group

141 hrs
25–34 avg/yr
Second lowest

283 hrs
65–74 avg/yr
More than double 15–24

Youth volunteer at the highest rates but give the fewest hours per person. **High participation is the foundation, depth is the opportunity.**

How much the typical volunteer gives

The typical young volunteer gives about 40 hours a year - less than one hour a week

Median annual volunteer hours · Canada · 2018 vs 2023

Age Group	Median hrs 2018	Median hrs 2023	Change
15–24 years	55 hrs	**40 hrs**	**−27%**
25–34 years	59 hrs	**40 hrs**	**−32%**
35–44 years	56 hrs	45 hrs	−20%
55–64 years	96 hrs	60 hrs	−38%
65–74 years	117 hrs	80 hrs	−32%

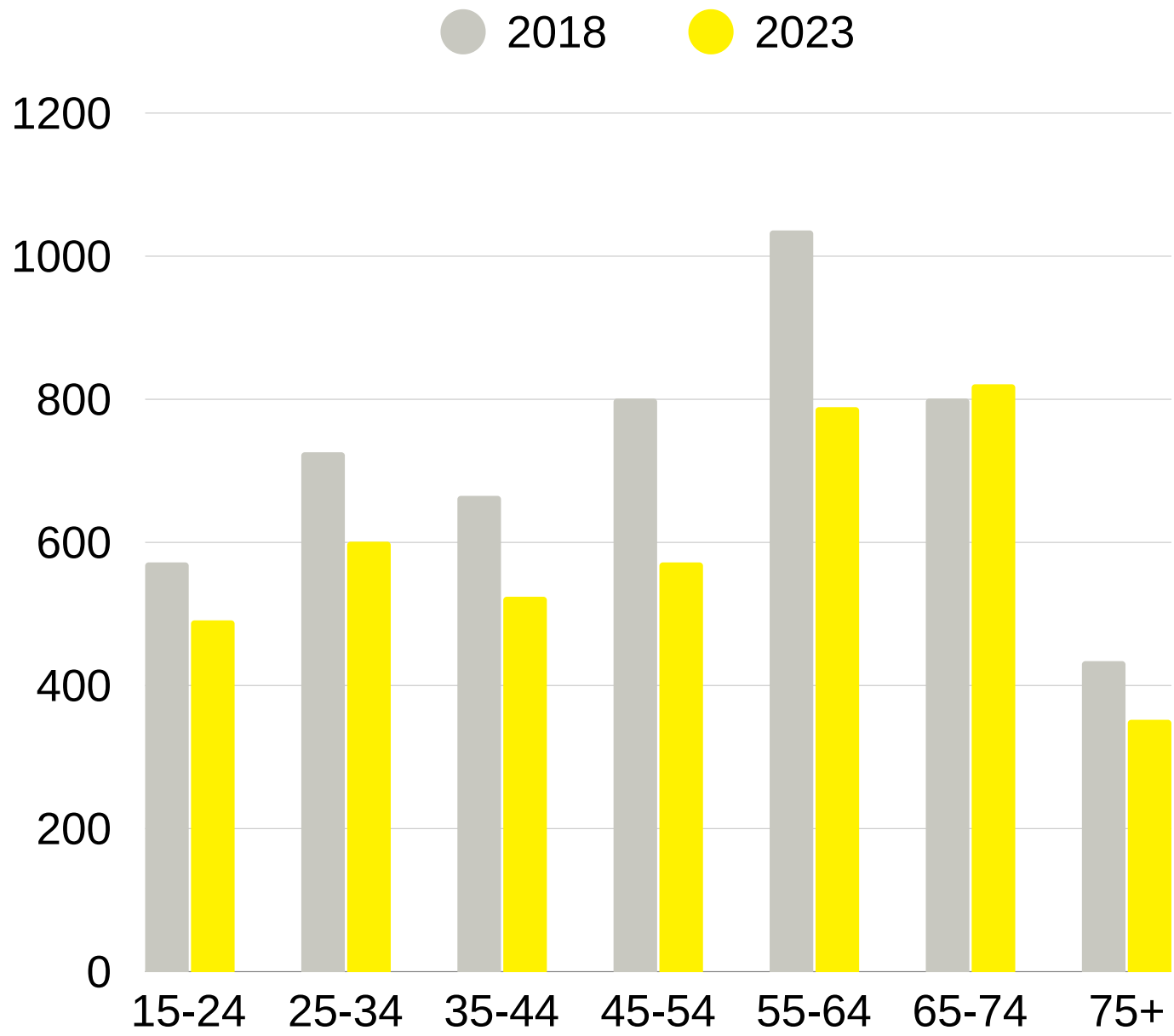
Both youth cohorts had **median hours of 40 in 2023** - tied for the lowest of any age group.

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Tables 45-10-0039-01 and 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

Total Contribution

Youth contributed over 1 billion volunteer hours in 2023 - and that total is falling

Total volunteer hours (millions) · Canada · 2018 vs 2023



15–24 years

572M → 491M

−81M (−14%)

25–34 years

726M → 601M

−125M (−17%)

Combined youth

1,298M → 1,092M

−206M (−16%)

Even as youth total hours fell, their share of national hours held roughly steady. The issue is not a collapse, it is that the **contribution is not growing with the population.**

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Tables 45-10-0039-01 and 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

The Formal Divide · 15–24 Years

15–24 year olds are leaving formal volunteering - not volunteering itself

Volunteer rate by definition · 15–24 years · Canada · 2018 vs 2023

FORMAL VOLUNTEERING

(through organizations)

52.3% → 39.9%

−12.4 pp

Steepest formal rate decline of any age group in Canada. More than 1 in 8 young formal volunteers stopped by 2023.

INFORMAL VOLUNTEERING

(direct help to individuals)

76.2% → 71.9%

−4.3 pp

A much smaller decline - less than a third of the formal drop. The helping instinct is intact; the organizational connection is breaking down.

The formal/informal gap is the most important signal in the 15–24 data. It tells organizations where to focus: **reduce barriers in structured programs, not in helping itself**.

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Tables 45-10-0039-01 and 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

A different story · 25–34 years

For 25–34 year olds, formal and informal volunteering fell at nearly the same rate

Volunteer rate by definition · 25–34 years · Canada · 2018 vs 2023

FORMAL RATE

36.8% → 27.9%

−8.9 pp

2018 → 2023

INFORMAL RATE

78.9% → 70.2%

−8.7 pp

2018 → 2023

The contrast with 15-24
For 15-24, formal fell 12.4 pp while informal fell only 4.3 pp, suggesting organizational barriers.

For 25-34, both fell nearly equally at ~8.8 pp, pointing instead to structural time and capacity pressures: career demands, housing, student debt, and early family formation.

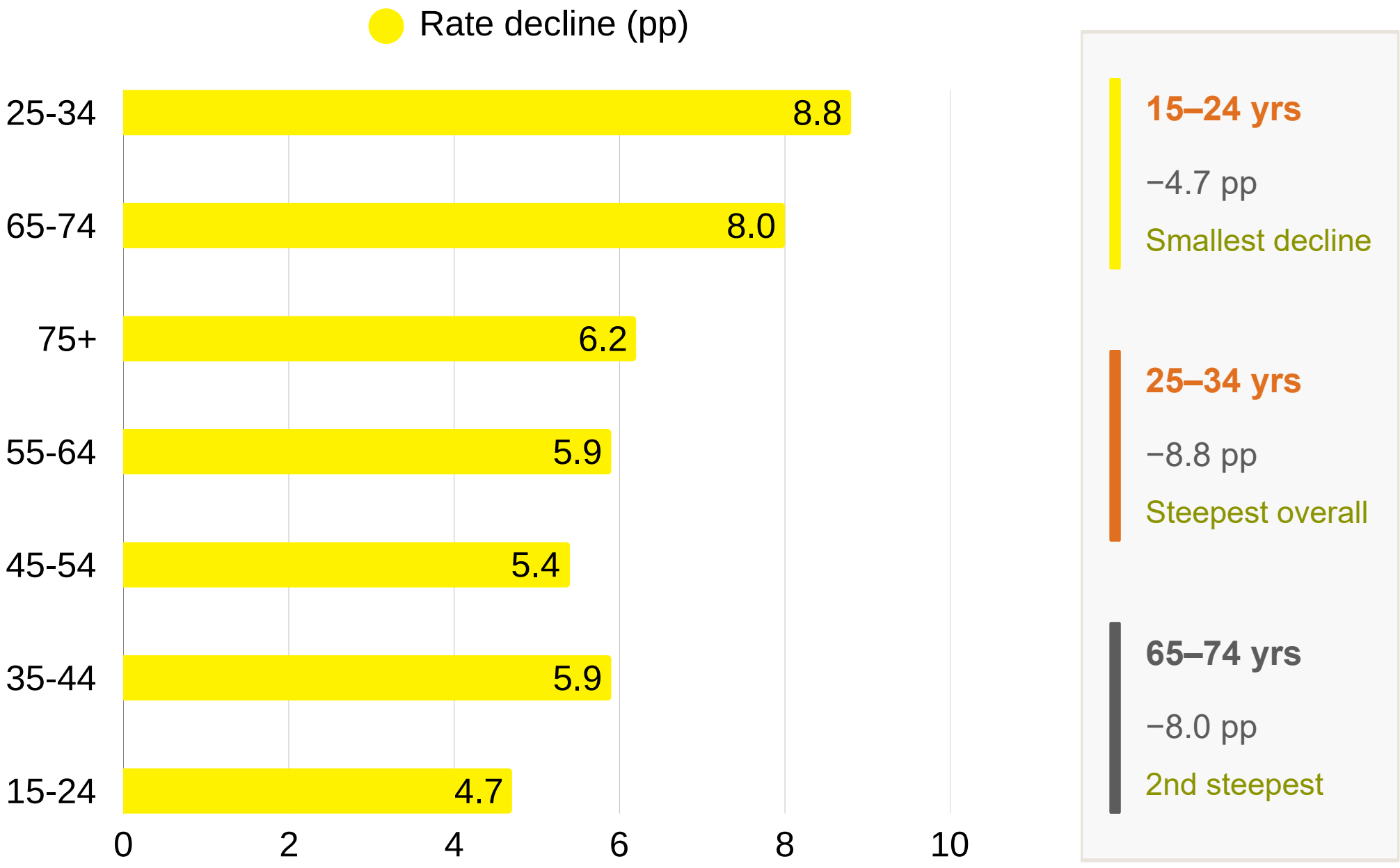
25–34 year olds have the steepest overall decline of any age group (−8.8 pp). Reaching them requires addressing time and life-stage barriers, not just program design.

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Tables 45-10-0039-01 and 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

The rate decline in context

25–34 year olds saw the steepest volunteer rate decline of any age group in Canada

Overall volunteer rate decline (pp) by age group · Canada · 2018 to 2023



The 15–24 rate decline is comparatively modest (−4.7 pp). This resilience - the highest rate, the smallest overall decline - is the strongest foundation the sector has to build on.

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Tables 45-10-0039-01 and 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

What youth bring to the sector

Young volunteers are already giving more than the numbers suggest, and the sector can help them give more

The highest participation rates in Canada

At 81.1%, 15–24 year olds are more likely to volunteer than any other age group. The pool is large - the challenge is depth, not reach.

A resilient helping instinct

For 15–24 year olds, informal volunteering held up (−4.3 pp) while formal fell sharply. The motivation is present; the organizational connection needs work.

Over 1 billion hours annually

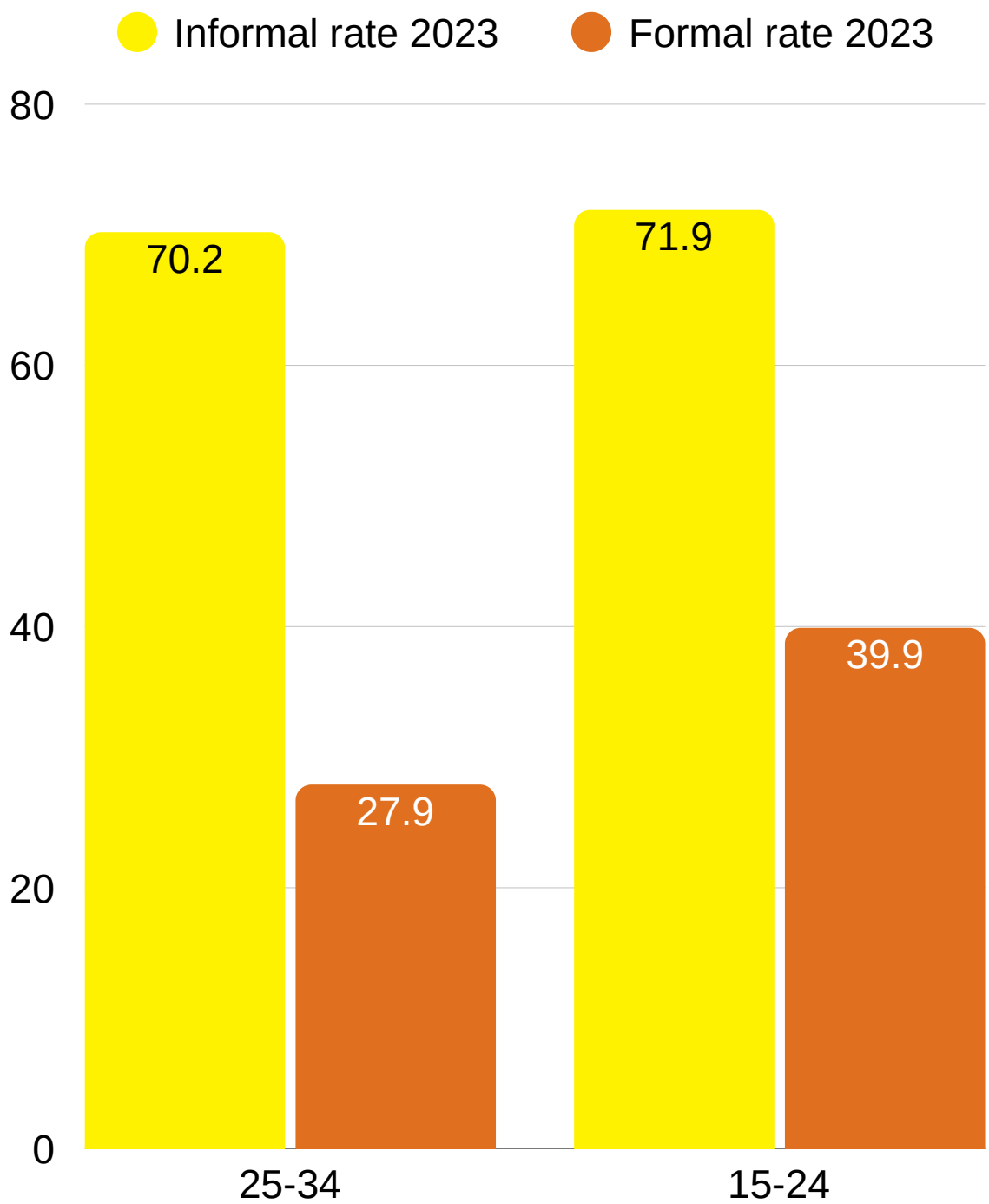
Together, 15–24 and 25–34 year olds contributed approximately 1.09 billion hours in 2023. That is a meaningful and foundational contribution to Canadian civic life.

An early habit that compounds

Volunteers who engage deeply in their 20s and 30s are the sector's most committed 50- and 60-year-old volunteers two decades from now. The return on early investment is long.

What the data is telling organizations

The formal/informal split is a signal, and organizations can act on it



Informal helping is the on-ramp

Young people already help informally at high rates. Clear pathways from informal to formal - without heavy barriers upfront - capture that energy.

Friction in formal programs is measurable

The 12.4 pp formal drop for 15–24 is the steepest of any age group. This reflects how accessible - or not - organizations have made it to get involved.

25–34 need flexibility, not just access

Both formal and informal fell equally here. The barrier is time and life-stage capacity. Skills-matched, short-term roles fit this group far better.

The data is not a verdict: it is a map. It shows where the gaps are and where organizations have real room to intervene.

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Tables 45-10-0039-01 and 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

Recommendations for volunteer-involving organizations

Five things organizations can do now, while the window is open

01	02	03	04	05
Reduce friction in formal programs	**Create pathways from informal to formal**	**Offer short-term and project-based roles for 25–34**	**Track hours, not just headcount**	**Invest in early relationships - the return is long**
The 12.4 pp formal decline for 15–24 is the clearest call to action in the data. Review onboarding, screening, and commitment requirements - and ask whether they are proportionate to the role.	Young people are already helping informally. Design entry points that start where they are, then deepen over time, rather than requiring a full commitment upfront.	Peak career, housing, and family pressures make sustained commitments hard for this cohort. Skills-matched, time-limited, and flexible opportunities fit better with where their lives are.	Youth have the highest participation rates but the lowest hours per volunteer. Counting participants without tracking depth misses the actual capacity question.	Young volunteers who develop a deep habit of engagement today become the sector's backbone in 20 years. Early investment in meaningful roles compounds over a lifetime.

Youth volunteering is not a problem to solve - it is an opportunity to develop.
The conditions to act are still favourable. The rates are high. The instinct is there. The window is now.

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Tables 45-10-0039-01 and 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

What this means for volunteer organizations

Act now. The window is open.

1. Youth have the highest volunteer rates of any age group, and the lowest hours per volunteer. Depth is the opportunity.

2. 15–24 year olds are leaving formal programs fastest while informal helping holds. Reduce barriers in formal volunteering.

3. 25–34 year olds face structural time pressures. Flexibility, not just access, can be the answer.

4. Young volunteers who engage deeply today are the sector's backbone in 2040. Prioritize investing in younger volunteers.

Data: Statistics Canada SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Tables 45-10-0039-01 and 45-10-0040-01)
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