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Date: 14 February 2018

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Missing Millennials: Finding the next generation of blood donors

Younger adults believe they are major donors. They're not.

Seattle, WA – According to a new national study conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of Bloodworks Northwest, 47% of younger adults (age 18-34) believe that they are more likely to give blood than older people. However, according to AABB (an international non-profit focusing on blood collection and banking and transfusion medicine) millennials account for only about 20% of collections. Nearly 60% of all blood donations come from people over 40, and people over 50 years old make up a disproportionate share of regular donors.

“It’s not that millennials are self-centered or always distracted by digital technology, but rather that they didn’t grow up understanding that giving blood can be a life-long habit, and meaningful way to regularly give back to the community,” said James P. AuBuchon, MD, president and CEO. “After getting out of school, most millennials disappear as blood donors as they become intent on building careers and starting families.”

People growing up from the 1940s to the 1970s came of age as transfusions became an everyday, lifesaving medical procedure. Non-profit community blood banks were a new phenomenon. Voluntary and regular blood donation was seen as part of one’s civic duty, and a cultural norm. “With the older demographic of regular donors aging out and not being replaced by younger adults, chronic blood shortages are looming,” AuBuchon said. “This is emerging as nothing short of a public health issue.”

February 14 is National Donor Day – an opportunity to raise awareness about blood donation that also urges people of all ages to join registries for organ, tissue and bone marrow donation.

“We know millennials care about helping others,” AuBuchon said. “When tragedies and emergencies happen, Northwest millennials show up in force to donate blood.” Public appeals after the recent Amtrak derailment near Olympia, the Las Vegas shootings and the Aurora Bridge bus crash (2015) drew large numbers of millennial donors.

AuBuchon points to a number of ways Bloodworks is ‘going to where millennials are’ as the way to engage this missing generation of donors. In the past two years it has set up booths at Seattle Tattoo Expo, and conducted drives at Seattle’s Haunted House at the Georgetown

Morgue. It is partnering with craft breweries and ice cream makers on “pint-for-a-pint” events, and has set up blood-typing kiosks at music festivals. In March, Bloodworks will again hold a special blood-typing event at the Emerald City Comic Con.

The Harris study demonstrated that there is a high awareness that more people should support the community blood supply through donation. Nearly 3 in 4 U.S. adults (72%) acknowledge that most people who are eligible to give blood may not actually do so.

The study also revealed that only about half of U.S. adults (53%) are aware that one-third of all adults will need a blood transfusion at some time during their lifetime. While 58% of adults said they have given blood at some time, fewer than 3 in 10 (28%) donated during the past five years. Those who have given blood in the past cited access to a blood drive (50%) and the desire to help others (49%) as the top reasons for their donation.

Non-donors noted medical or health barriers to eligibility (31%) and discomfort with needles (30%) to explain their decision.

Research Methodology

The national survey was conducted online by Harris Poll on behalf of BloodworksNW from January 19-23, 2018 among 2,275 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. The survey is not based on a probability sample and no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact John Yeager Senior Media Content Strategist / Bloodworks Northwest 425-765-9845.

About BloodworksNW

Bloodworks (formerly Puget Sound Blood Center) is backed by 70 years of Northwest history and 250,000 donors. It is local, nonprofit, independent, volunteer-supported and community-based. A recognized leader in transfusion medicine, Bloodworks serves patients in more than 90 hospitals in Washington, Oregon and Alaska—partnering closely with local hospitals to deliver the highest level of patient care. Comprehensive services include blood components, complex cross-matching, specialized lab services for organ transplants, care for patients with blood disorders, and collection of cord blood stem cells for cancer treatment. Bloodworks Research Institute performs leading-edge research in blood biology, transfusion medicine, blood storage and treatment of blood disorders. Patients with traumatic injuries, undergoing surgeries or organ transplantation, or receiving treatment for cancer and blood disorders all depend on our services, expertise, laboratories and research. For more information and to make an appointment to give blood, visit bloodworksnw.org

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