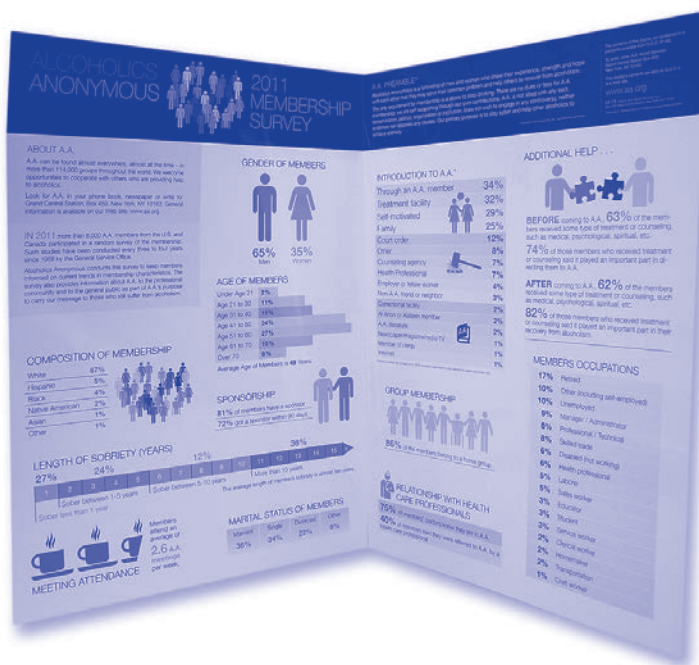


# About AA

## 2011 A.A. Membership Survey Reveals Current Trends



More than 8,000 members, randomly selected from the U.S. and Canada, participated in the survey, helping to generate a composite picture of some of the key characteristics of A.A. and its members. According to an analysis of the survey, the typical member is 49 years old, has been sober almost 10 years, attends two-and-a-half meetings a week, belongs to a home group and has a sponsor (often getting that sponsor in the first 90 days of sobriety).

Highlighting the importance of one-on-one work between members and carrying the message to professionals, the survey indicates that 34% of the respondents cited an A.A. member as being most responsible for their coming to A.A., while 40% of the respondents were referred to A.A. by a health care professional. Additionally, 63% of respondents received some type of treatment or counseling before coming to A.A., and, of those, 74% said it played an important part in directing them to A.A. Subsequently, after coming to A.A., 62% of respondents received some type of treatment or counseling, such as medical, psychological, spiritual, etc., and 82% of those said it played an important part in their recovery from alcoholism.

Men outnumber women (65% to 35%), and while the occupations represented in the survey cover a wide range from manager/administrator, professional/technical, and skilled trade to laborer, sales worker, educator, homemaker, etc., the single largest category for respondents was “retired” (17%).

Key findings of the latest survey are available and in an updated version of the pamphlet “Alcoholics Anonymous 2011 Membership Survey” (P-48). To order, write to the General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. The survey is also available online at [aa.org](http://aa.org) in the “For the Media” section.

### Frequently Asked Questions About Anonymity

The concept of anonymity, as it relates to Alcoholics Anonymous, can be difficult for non-A.A.s to understand, but often it also presents questions for A.A. members. From time to time the General Service Office receives queries regarding various aspects of anonymity. Here are a few, along with responses from A.A. literature.

**Q.** “I saw an ad in the paper for an A.A. group. It told where the group was meeting and everything. Shouldn’t you contact that group about breaking their anonymity at the public level?”

**A.** “Suppose a sick alcoholic never has the good fortune to meet an A.A. How is such a person going to find us? The search will be difficult if the local group thinks it should be anonymous, too. The (Eleventh) Tradition is talking about ‘personal anonymity,’ remember? Alcoholics will not be attracted to A.A. if they don’t know that it exists...” (“The Twelve Traditions Illustrated”)

One of the questions most often asked by professionals about A.A. is “How effective is A.A.?” A.A. does not keep track of individuals members or do case studies, and its members remain anonymous, making that question a difficult one. While many outside of A.A. have conducted research into that question, the only statistical information available from A.A. about itself are anonymous surveys of the A.A. Fellowship, which have been conducted by its General Service Office every three years since 1968. These surveys offer an overview of current trends in membership characteristics, with the purposes of sharing information about A.A. membership with professionals and giving A.A. more information about itself so that members can better help suffering alcoholics.

Survey questions cover personal statistics (age, gender, race, occupation, marital status), A.A. activity (frequency of meeting attendance, group membership, sponsorship), how the individual was introduced to A.A. in the first place (A.A. members, family, etc.), and experience with professionals, such as experience with treatment facilities, the medical profession and other types of counseling.

Results of the 2011 random membership survey were recently published and provide a snapshot of the A.A. Fellowship. Like the previous survey, published in 2007, the results confirm some positive and interesting trends tracked over the past decade and illuminate the great importance of A.A. members reaching out to and attracting new members to the Fellowship.

**Q.** “I’m not ashamed of my alcoholism and don’t feel any need to keep my A.A. membership a secret. In fact, I think that my story will be able to help lots of others. I think that I should be able to use my full name in my book (or television interview, blog, Web site, etc.) when I share my A.A. experience. Why should anyone else have a problem with that?”

**A.** Disclosing your A.A. membership at the public level, in any publicly accessible medium, is considered a break of the A.A. Tradition of Anonymity. Bill W. wrote, in an article in *The Best of the Grapevine*, Volume 1, p. 278, “The old files at A.A. Headquarters reveal many scores of . . . experiences with broken anonymity. Most of them point up the same lessons. They tell us that we alcoholics are the biggest rationalizers in the world; that fortified with the excuse we are doing great things for A.A. we can, through broken anonymity, resume our old and disastrous pursuit of personal power and prestige, public honors, and money — the same implacable urges that when frustrated once caused us to drink. . . .”

**Q.** “Why do we say that ‘anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all of our Traditions?’”

**A.** “. . .anonymity is real humility at work. It is an all-pervading spiritual quality which today keynotes A.A. life everywhere. Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as A.A. members both among fellow alcoholics and before the general public. As we lay aside these very human aspirations, we believe that each of us takes part in the weaving of a protective mantle which covers our whole Society and under which we may grow and work in unity.” (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 187)

## A.A.’s Big Book: A Cultural Icon

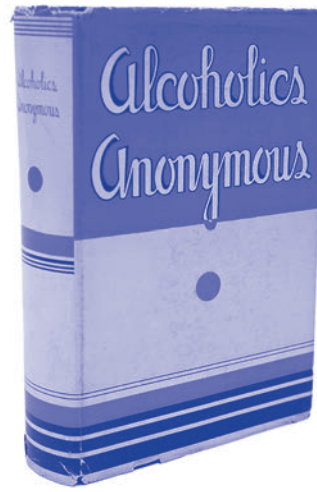
A.A.’s Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, has been included in a U.S. Library of Congress exhibit celebrating “Books That Shaped America.”

“This list of ‘Books That Shaped America’ is not a register of the ‘best’ American books,” says Librarian of Congress James H. Billington, “although many of them fit that description. Rather, the list is intended to spark a national conversation on books written by Americans that have influenced our lives.”

Curators and experts from throughout the Library of Congress contributed their choices for the exhibition, which ran from June 25th through September 29th in Washington, D.C.

Listed chronologically, the Big Book sits on this list of 88 iconic books between Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* (1938) and John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

The list and the exhibit shine a light on the importance of books to shape and direct our lives and, in the experience of suffering alcoholics — in America and elsewhere — there is no book more important than *Alcoholics Anonymous*. First published in 1939 the Big Book is now in its Fourth Edition and has sold over 30 million



*A first edition, first printing of Alcoholics Anonymous, known as the “Big Book,” with the original red and yellow “circus” style dust jacket. Released in 1939, its large size was due to the use of the thickest paper the publisher had available. This was purposefully chosen to make the book bulky, so a purchaser would feel they had gotten their money’s worth. It was also chosen because of the belief that the early recovering alcoholic would be able to handle the thicker pages better.*

copies. Considered by many to be a cultural icon, its simple approach to alcoholism has opened the doors to recovery for millions, both at home and abroad.

## Revisions of Two Pamphlets

- “*A.A. and the Armed Services*” has been updated to include recent experiences from members on active duty, as well as stories from veterans of the armed services.
- “*It Sure Beats Seating in a Cell*” has been completely revamped. The revised pamphlet, with all new text and sketches, contains personal stories that portray the strength and hope of a wide range of incarcerated alcoholics, from those serving a life sentence to kids at a juvenile detention center.



## How Can A.A. Help You?

Would you be interested in having an A.A. presentation at one of your professional gatherings? Or would you like information for your clients about recovery from alcoholism in A.A.? If so, please contact the C.P.C. desk at the General Service Office, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, or [cpc@aa.org](mailto:cpc@aa.org). We welcome your questions, comments and requests.

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