Senior Corps & Health Benefits

For decades, volunteers age 55+ have been serving their communities through Senior Corps programs, led by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the federal agency for service, volunteering, and civic engagement. Each year, Senior Corps engages more than 245,000 older adults in volunteer service through its Foster Grandparent, Senior Companion, and RSVP programs, enriching the lives of the volunteers and benefiting their communities.

Senior Corps volunteers who serve as Foster Grandparents become one-on-one tutors, mentors, and friends to young people with exceptional needs, where they act as role models to reinforce important life values. Senior Companion volunteers help elderly, homebound seniors and other adults maintain independence, keeping aging adults in their own homes by providing respite care and independent living services.

Contributing to the belief that volunteering has health benefits, CNCS launched two longitudinal studies in 2015 to assess the impact of service on Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion volunteers and the caregivers of Senior Companion clients.

Key Findings
Interim findings from these studies show positive effects on health and well-being in Senior Corps volunteers, as well as for caregivers of Senior Companion clients. The volunteers reported improvements in health, physical capacity, anxiety and depression, loneliness and social isolation, and life satisfaction.

Senior Corps Volunteer Study
The Senior Corps volunteer study showed that just after one year of service:

Nearly half of Senior Corps volunteers (46%) reported improved health and well-being, and more than one-third who initially reported they were in good health, reported improved health at the end of the one-year period. Almost two-thirds of Senior Corps volunteers (63%) reported a decrease in feelings of isolation, and 67% of those who first reported they “often” lack companionship, reported improved social connections.

70% of Senior Corps volunteers who initially reported five or more symptoms of depression, report fewer symptoms at the end of the first year of service, and 63% of volunteers who initially reported three or four symptoms of depression also report fewer symptoms.

SeniorCorps.gov/HealthyVolunteers
Senior Companion Program Caregiver Study
The results of the Senior Companion program caregiver study provide evidence that Senior Companion respite services positively impact the health and well-being of those charged with serving as caregivers for their loved ones. Caregivers were grouped into critical, essential, and moderate categories based on personal and family needs. Those in the critical-needs group were the ones with the highest needs.

- Nearly 76% of caregivers in the critical-needs group reported Senior Companion respite services helped them “a lot” with both personal time and household management.
- Approximately 60% of caregivers with critical needs reported that Senior Companion services helped them “a lot” or a “great deal” and allowed them to be more involved in social activities and enjoy time with their friends or relatives.
- Most caregivers (92% critical needs, 86% with essential needs, and 93% with moderate needs) reported they were satisfied with the respite services received from the Senior Companion program.
- Approximately 40% of caregivers who rated their health as fair or poor before respite support, now rate their health as good.

Methodology
The longitudinal studies seek to establish the impact of volunteer service and respite care services on Senior Corps volunteers and caregivers of Senior Companion clients.

The Senior Corps volunteer study surveys first-time Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion volunteers at entrance into the program and at one- and two-year follow-up points. Several health and psycho-social questions from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) survey, developed at the University of Michigan, were used by this study to provide identical measures to a national comparison group. The longitudinal study analysis compared Senior Corps volunteers who participated in the study with the HRS sample on all outcomes.

The Senior Companion program caregiver study surveys seek to establish the impact of respite services on caregivers of Senior Companion clients. New caregivers were surveyed prior to the start of respite care and at a one year follow-up point.

Senior Corps by the Numbers

- 245,000 Senior Corps volunteers serve in 28,100 locations each year.
- Senior Corps volunteers serve 74.6 million hours each year.
- Senior Corps volunteers provide independent living services to 840,000 older adults each year.
- Senior Corps volunteers mentor and tutor 267,000 children each year.

Full interim report expected later this year: SeniorCorps.gov/HealthyVolunteers

The mission of the Corporation for National and Community Service is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.