

# HEALTH BENEFITS OF SENIOR CORPS



## SENIOR CORPS: IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL GENERATIONS.

Research shows that volunteering is good for the health and well-being of volunteers. But for older Americans with low-incomes and lower levels of education, a group vulnerable to poor health outcomes, many obstacles can make it difficult to volunteer. As a result, these individuals may miss out on the health and well-being benefits of volunteering, and communities may miss out on the volunteer service these individuals provide.

A new independent report sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service offers some good news: Senior Corps provides the access, structure, and financial support for low-income, at-risk Americans 55 and older to live **happier, healthier lives while making a difference in their communities.**



New findings show after two-years of service, first-time Senior Corps volunteers in the Foster Grandparent Program and Senior Companion Program reported **improvements in health, decreased depression and less social isolation.**

## SENIOR CORPS VOLUNTEERS FEEL HEALTHIER

Senior Corps volunteers reported much higher self-rated health scores, compared to older adults in similar circumstances who do not volunteer. Self-rated-health has been determined to be a valid marker of actual health.

**84%** of older adults reported improved or stable health, after two years of service in Senior Corps.

**32%** of Senior Corps volunteers who reported good health at the beginning of the study reported improved health at the two-year follow-up.

## SENIOR CORPS VOLUNTEERS ARE LESS DEPRESSED, LESS ISOLATED

Senior Corps volunteers reported feeling significantly less depressed and less isolated compared to non-volunteers. Social isolation is associated with depression and health issues including mortality.

**78%** of those who reported 5 or more symptoms at the beginning of the study said they felt less depressed two years later.

**88%** of Senior Corps volunteers who first described a lack of companionship reported a decrease in feelings of isolation after two years.

## SENIOR CORPS PROVIDES ACCESS, STRUCTURE, FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Senior Corps provides older adults with important opportunities to serve their community.

**80%** of Senior Corps volunteers serving through the Foster Grandparent or Senior Companion programs report household income less than \$20,000 per year.

**34%** report a long-lasting condition that limits basic physical activity.

Individuals with these characteristics face barriers to volunteering and are typically underrepresented in volunteering opportunities. These factors are considered high-risk for poorer health outcomes and other health disparities. Senior Corps programs successfully recruit and retain these older adults into important volunteer opportunities. Through their service, Senior Corps volunteers found: **Satisfying and meaningful community service, opportunities for personal growth, a sense of accomplishment, and chances to make new friends.**

One key difference between Senior Corps and other volunteering opportunities is the provision of a small hourly stipend for volunteers who have incomes up to twice the poverty line. While the large majority of volunteers reported joining service for altruistic reasons, close to one-third had an underlying financial reason. The modest stipend provided by Senior Corps helps remove the barriers to volunteering and ensures participants don't incur additional costs while serving.

## SENIOR CORPS: MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

While the current study focuses on the health benefits to Senior Corps volunteers, Senior Corps volunteers also make a difference in their communities. 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 approximately 220,000 older adults in volunteer service through its Foster Grandparent, Senior Companion, and RSVP programs, enriching the lives of the volunteers and benefiting their communities.



### FOSTER GRANDPARENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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. In 2017, around 22,000 Foster Grandparent volunteers helped approximately 150,000 children through a nationwide network of organizations.

### SENIOR COMPANIONS PROVIDE COMPANIONSHIP AND SUPPORT TO THE ELDERLY

Senior Corps volunteers who serve as Senior Companions help elderly, homebound seniors, and other adults maintain independence and remain in their own homes, often avoiding costly institutional care. Senior Companions help clients with daily living tasks such as grocery shopping, transportation to medical appointments, and notification to doctors or loved ones of potential problems. At the same time, they provide caregivers and family members much-needed respite.

## SENIOR CORPS BY THE NUMBERS

**200,000+**  
volunteers each year

**54 million**  
hours served each year

The **Corporation for National and Community Service** is a federal agency that engages millions of Americans in service through its AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs and leads the nation's volunteering and service efforts.



## SENIOR COMPANION PROGRAM CAREGIVER STUDY

The results of a Senior Companion Program (SCP) caregiver study also provide evidence that respite services provided by SCP volunteers 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.

**76%** of caregivers in the critical-needs group reported Senior Companion respite services helped them “a lot” with both personal time and household management.

**60%** of caregivers reported that the services allowed them to be more involved in social activities and enjoy time with their friends and family.

**40%** of caregivers who rated their health as fair or poor before respite support, now rate their health as good.

\*approximately

## METHODOLOGY

The two longitudinal studies establish the impact of volunteer service on Senior Corps volunteers serving with the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) and the Senior Companion Program (SCP), as well as the impact of volunteer service for caregivers of Senior Companion clients.

The two-year study, launched in 2014, collected data from 1,200 first-time Senior Corps volunteers throughout their service with the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion programs to determine the effect of national service on older adults’ overall health and well-being.

The study surveyed first-time Senior Corps volunteers upon 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 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 FGP and SCP volunteers to a sample of HRS respondents, both volunteers and non-volunteers, as well as to the FGP and SCP volunteers who left service during the study period.

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

The information included in this document is constructed through a sub-analysis conducted in August of 2018. For the full study, visit the website below.