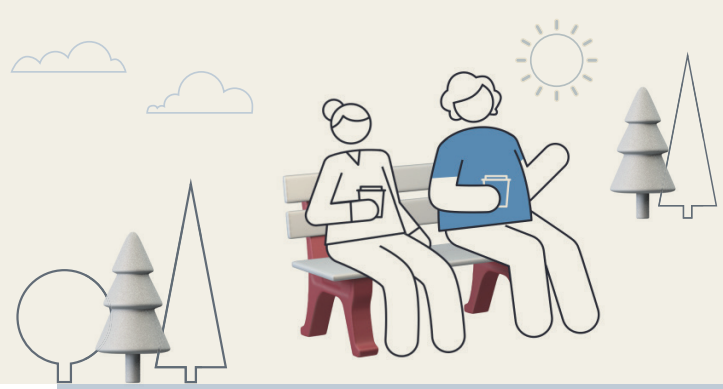




Improving the Quality of Life for All Generations



Senior Corps volunteers are **healthier, less depressed, and more connected** compared with those who do not volunteer regularly.

BACKGROUND

A **rigorous, independent study** sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) examined how participation in two Senior Corps programs – the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) and Senior Companion Program (SCP) – contributes to changes in health and well-being in this population of older adult volunteers.

The research shows that volunteering can have a positive impact on an individual's overall health and well-being. However, for older Americans with low incomes and lower levels of education – a group that is especially at risk for poor health outcomes – obstacles can make it difficult to volunteer.

Through FGP and SCP, Senior Corps provides volunteer opportunities to adults age 55 and older with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, some of whom receive a minor stipend. Senior Corps volunteers come from a variety of racial, educational, and financial backgrounds.

HEALTH

Self-rated health scores are a reliable measurement of overall health.¹ Senior Corps volunteers **reported significantly higher self-rated health scores** compared with older adults in similar circumstances who do not volunteer, and a significant number of Senior Corps volunteers **showed stable health**. Stability is a strong indicator of impact over time, especially for older populations who have characteristics that put them at risk for poor health outcomes:

- After two years of service, **22 percent** of all volunteers reported improved health and **62 percent** reported that their health was stable
- **32 percent** of volunteers who reported good health at baseline reported improved health at the two-year follow-up, and **55 percent** of volunteers who reported good health at baseline continued to report good health at the two-year follow-up

Looking at the volunteers' demographic composition, they are typically unmarried women with an average age of 65, who have completed some college.

FIRST-TIME VOLUNTEERS IN FGP/SCP

RACE

- 0.3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- 2% Native American/Alaska Native
- 3% Asian
- 3% More than one race

45% African-American

47% White

SEX

9% Male

91% Female

EDUCATION

11% Less than high school

16% Bachelor's or advanced degree

30% High school diploma or GED

43% Associate's degree

ACCESSIBILITY

34% Disabled*

66% Able-bodied

ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

5% \$30,000 and higher

15% \$20,000 – \$29,999

80% Less than \$20,000

AGE

9% 76 years or older

40% 66 – 75 years

51% 55 – 65 years

* "Disabled" is defined as a long-lasting condition or any condition that substantially limits basic physical activities.

WELL-BEING

Well-being is the **complex interaction among biological, psychological, and social factors**² – and all three are determinants of health and disease. Older adults often exhibit signs of depression and experience social isolation. Both experiences can contribute to a variety of negative health outcomes, and social isolation is seen as a critical public health crisis. After two years of volunteering with Senior Corps, **volunteers reported significant improvements in their well-being:**

- **78 percent** of those who reported five or more symptoms of depression at the beginning of the study said that they felt less depressed two years later
- **88 percent** of those who first described a lack of companionship reported decreased feelings of isolation after two years³

METHODOLOGY

These findings are from an independent evaluation of the Senior Corps program, based on a two-year longitudinal survey of more than **1,200 active volunteers**, with an **85 percent** response rate. The report compared two matched groups: Senior Corps non-retained volunteers and a matched sample national cohort of seniors, one of volunteers and one of non-volunteers. The latter samples were drawn from the Health and Retirement Study, a longitudinal project sponsored by the National Institute on Aging and the Social Security Administration.

CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE (CNCS)

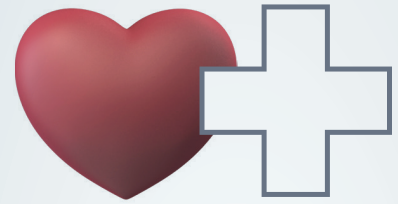
CNCS is a federal agency that engages millions of Americans in service through its AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs and leads the nation's volunteering and service efforts. CNCS helps millions of Americans improve their lives and the lives of their fellow citizens through service. CNCS also works hand-in-hand with local partners to tap the ingenuity and can-do spirit of the American people to tackle our country's most pressing challenges.

SENIOR CORPS

Senior Corps is a network of national service programs for Americans age 55 and older, made up of three primary programs: Senior Companion, Foster Grandparent, and RSVP. Each takes a different approach to improving lives and fostering civic engagement. Senior Corps volunteers commit their time to address critical community needs, including academic tutoring and mentoring, elderly care, disaster relief support, and more.

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION (ORE)

ORE furthers the mission of CNCS by producing accurate and timely research on national service, social innovation, volunteering, and civic engagement. The office conducts original and sponsored research and evaluations, supports evaluations of grantees' research and programs, and promotes evidence-based service models – all of which infuse data into CNCS programs and contribute to the public understanding of national service.



Caring for an older adult, especially someone with dementia or a chronic illness, commonly causes stress and physical exhaustion. Respite services provided by SCP volunteers positively affect the health and well-being of those charged with serving as caregivers for their loved ones with critical needs:

- **Nearly 76 percent** of caregivers reported that respite services helped them with both personal time and household management
- **Approximately 60 percent** indicated that respite services helped them “a lot” and allowed them to be more involved in social activities and enjoy time with their friends or relatives

RESOURCES:

Visit www.seniorcorps.gov/healthyvolunteers to read the full report

Contact: seniorcorps@cns.gov

Get involved in your community by visiting www.seniorcorps.gov

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 



¹ Bombak, Andrea E. “Self-Rated Health and Public Health: A Critical Perspective.” *Frontiers in Public Health*, vol. 1, 15, May 20, 2013.

² Carandang, Carlo G. “Response to Commentary: Biopsychosocial assessment: Why the biopsychosocial and rarely the social?” *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [Journal de l'Académie Canadienne de Psychiatrie de l'Enfant et de l'Adolescent]*, vol. 33, 1 (2009): 303–310.

³ Pratt, D., et al. “SCP Independent Living Performance Measurement Survey: Process, Rationale, Results, and Recommendations.” *Evidence Exchange*. JBS International, Inc., North Bethesda, MD, 2014.