

California Department of Aging

Senior Companion Program Narrative

Program / Element / Component -- 40.90.70

Description

The Senior Companion Program (SCP) provides supportive services to adults with physical, emotional or mental health limitations, the majority of whom are elderly, in an effort to achieve and maintain their highest level of independent living. The Program's purpose is to engage persons aged 60 years and older; particularly those with limited incomes in volunteer service to meet critical community needs and to provide a high-quality experience that will enrich the lives of the volunteers and those they serve.

Senior Companion volunteers assist homebound clients with chores, light housekeeping, paying bills, grocery shopping, and providing transportation to medical and other appointments. In institutional settings, such as mental health and skilled nursing facilities, the Senior Companion volunteer assists with validation therapy and encourages participation in activities designed to help the individual to regain independence. In many instances, the Senior Companion volunteer is an integral part of a care management team and is trained in how and when to alert health care professionals and/or family members of potential health problems. In addition, many Senior Companion volunteers have worked with persons diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, stroke, diabetes, and mental illness.

Benefits

Senior Companion volunteers receive a modest tax-exempt stipend, a free meal or meal reimbursement for each day of service; reimbursement for transportation to and from the work site; supplemental accident, personal liability and excess automobile insurance coverage; an annual physical examination; and personal recognition for their efforts.

Eligibility

Senior Companion volunteers must be aged 60 years or older and meet the established income eligibility guidelines. Senior Companion volunteers must be willing to serve an established number of hours per week, up to a maximum number of hours per year. Participants receive pre-service orientation training before assignment and monthly in-service training thereafter.

Access

Information about SCP and how to qualify and receive services can be obtained by calling the statewide toll free line at **1-800-510-2020** or the local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) listed in the blue-bordered pages of the Community Services section of the telephone book, under Senior Information and Referral/Assistance, or access the California Department of Aging website at www.aging.ca.gov.

Background

The program was established by Chapter (CH) 1121/79 (Mello). State Code: Division 8.5, Welfare and Institutions Code, Section 9520-9527. The intent of this bill was to add supplemental funds to the already established seven federally funded SCPs located in the State. Federal authority is the Domestic Volunteer Services Act of 1973, as amended in 1999, Public Law 93-113 (42 U.S.C. Section 5013). This program augments the larger federal Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) Program. State-funded-only programs must meet all federal requirements and must receive authority from CNCS and be designated to operate as an official SCP in order for the volunteers to receive a tax-exempt stipend.

In 1979, State legislation was enacted that established the SCP in California.

CH 1458/83 (Mello) extended the program through 1/1/88.

CH 1007/87 (Mello) lifted the 1/1/88 sunset date.

Assembly Bill (AB) 2800, the Mello-Grandlund Older Californians Act (Chapter 1097, Statutes of 1996), integrated distinct Community-Based Services Programs (CBSP) into one Community-Based Services Network and transferred responsibility for related contract administration from the California Department of Aging to the AAAs. SCP is one of these seven programs.

The Budget Change Proposal for Fiscal Year (FY) 1998/99 added 26 sites to expand services to all non-served Planning and Service Areas in the State. In FY 1999/00, the Program was augmented in the State General Fund resources to increase the State's share of the volunteer stipend.

Due to an unallocated General Fund reduction of one million dollars to CBSPs in FY 2000/01, the result was a decrease in service, reduction of Volunteer Service Years, total hours of service, and fewer seniors being served.

In FY 2002/03, the Program was augmented by State General Fund resources in order to meet the required federal volunteer stipend. On March 10, 2003, the Legislature enacted Senate Bill X1 19, which reduced funding for the SCP. This decrease resulted in a reduction of volunteer positions and total hours of service, with fewer seniors being served. The Program was set for elimination beginning FY 2003-04.

Effective July 1, 2003, the Budget Act restored funding for SCP local assistance, which was a partial restoration of the prior year's allocation.

Effective November 23, 2007, CNCS issued a final rule published in the Federal Register 45 CFR, Parts 2510, 2522, 2540, 2551, and 2552, which requires grantees to conduct state criminal registry checks and National Sex Offender Public Registry checks on volunteers.

Due to past General Fund reductions, the SCP does not operate in all Planning and Service Areas.