



**Public Health**  
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**Panhandle Health District**

## **Panhandle Health District**

*Healthy People in Healthy Communities*

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### **NEWS RELEASE**

#### **Senior Companions Program in Need of Volunteers** Panhandle Health District – September 7, 2023



*Senior Companions Program volunteers at their annual appreciation luncheon*

The Senior Companions Program sponsored by Panhandle Health District (PHD) is a volunteer program that provides companionship and respite care to the elderly and disabled. The program needs additional volunteers to serve seniors in the five northern counties: Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai, and Shoshone. The Companions program

allows low-income senior volunteers an opportunity to assist those who need minor help to continue living independently. Senior Companions visit clients in their homes, but it is not an in-home care program.

“We are always seeking volunteers to assist with companionship for this fun and rewarding program,” said Daniel Perry, Senior Companions Program coordinator. “Over the past year we’ve lost about thirty-five percent of our volunteers due to some leaving the area, others have gone from being a volunteer to becoming clients of the program, and a few unfortunately have passed.”

Senior Companions are volunteers, 55 or older, who provide a meaningful service to homebound individuals and their families through weekly home visits. The Companion program had around 54 volunteers in 2022, and that number has dwindled down to 36 volunteers. The client list has done the opposite and has continued to grow, reaching up to 133 community members requesting a companion.

“We continue to see a high need for Senior Companions in our north Idaho area and it’s heartbreaking to know so many clients have to be kept on a waitlist until we can find a companion for them,” said Perry. “Volunteers play cards or a board game, drive to doctor appointments, or accompany clients to the grocery store. Sometimes they just sit, chat and enjoy each other’s company because the social aspect of the program for both the volunteer and the client is beneficial.”

The goal of Senior Companions — a Senior Corps program that operates under the umbrella of Americorps — is to help the clients live as independently as possible. The Companion program is offered to clients free of charge. Senior Companion volunteers receive a tax-free hourly stipend, mileage reimbursement, and other benefits.

Companions and clients are matched based on shared interests and experiences to ensure a positive experience for everyone. Volunteering also has health benefits. In national studies, volunteers report lower instances of depression, anxiety, and chronic pain, as well as higher self-esteem.

The Senior Companions Program touches hundreds of lives in north Idaho. Last year, volunteers put in over 30,000 hours and drove more than 135,000 miles serving clients.

If you are interested in volunteering, contact Daniel Perry at 208-415-5177 or [dperry@phd1.idaho.gov](mailto:dperry@phd1.idaho.gov). To learn more about the Senior Companions Program, visit: [www.seniorcompanionsidaho.org/](http://www.seniorcompanionsidaho.org/)

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**Panhandle Health District** provides over 40 different public health programs to families, individuals and organizations in northern Idaho. From food and drinking water safety to

health education and disease control, public health services are critical to ensure our community is a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

The PHD team is made up of nurses, nutritionists, environmental health specialists, health educators and many other dedicated professionals with a common goal to deliver vital public health services.

Panhandle Health District is one of seven health districts in the state of Idaho.