

# COVID-19 Volunteer FAQs

The Hawaii State Department of Health (HDOH) and the Healthcare Association of Hawaii are asking health professionals to sign up for Hawaii's Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) as a potential surge, volunteer workforce to address COVID-19.

## How to Sign Up

People who want to volunteer should complete the secure [application](#) via Nā Lima Kāko'o (NLK), the state's **Emergency System for the Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals (ESAR-VHP)**.

Volunteers will join Hawaii's Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), the volunteer group directed by the Hawaii Department of Health. The volunteer coordinator will activate MRC volunteers, depending on the task and need.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Who can volunteer?

Anyone can volunteer for clinical or non-clinical roles.

This includes people with an active clinical license, those who have retired, those without an active license, or those with an out-of-state license.

Go to <https://health.hawaii.gov/prepare/mrc/> for more information.

### What kind of volunteers are needed?

- The most needed healthcare professionals are physicians, nurses (registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and advanced practice registered nurses), respiratory therapists, certified nurse aides, nurse assistants, pharmacists, radiologic technologists, surgical technicians, emergency medical technicians, medical assistants, and community health workers.
- Volunteers are also needed for non-clinical roles, such as interpretation (languages and hearing impaired), administration, coordination, food delivery, clerical work, training and data entry.
- All volunteers are valued and need only to have a willingness to help.

### What are the requirements to be considered as a volunteer?

- Volunteers must sign up with and be approved by a Hawaii MRC Unit Coordinator.
- Once volunteers are approved, the HDOH will share specific criteria for needed volunteer assignments when the department is ready to activate volunteers. This will help volunteers know if they are a right fit for a specific assignment.
- If, and when activation becomes necessary, volunteers will be contacted through the system and asked about their availability. Volunteers can accept or decline a request for help to participate.

### How will volunteers know if they are activated?

- The MRC Unit Coordinator will contact MRC volunteers by email or phone.
- Specifics will be given to activated volunteers.

### How long will I be activated?

- This will vary based on the needs of each volunteer activation.
- The HDOH will share specifics before a volunteer commits to being activated. MRC volunteers will be asked for their deployment preferences.

### Can I apply if I'm not currently licensed or practicing in a medical field or my license has expired?

- Yes. MRC units need both medical and non-medical volunteers.
- Volunteers with prior medical expertise but without an active license could potentially serve in a medical capacity or a non-medical capacity depending on the situation and need.
- There will also be many needs for unlicensed health professionals and for volunteers without medical training.

### Is the MRC volunteer program the only way for medical or healthcare professionals to contribute their services?

- No. There are other non-medical volunteer opportunities through local non-profits and through [Hawaii State Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters \(HSVOAD\)](#).
- There are also healthcare facilities with current employment needs. To find out more information see current job openings listed directly on their websites.

### I'm a medical professional. How will my credentials be verified?

- The appropriate licensing board will be used to verify the status of licenses.
- Only volunteer healthcare professionals with verified credentials will be allowed to provide patient care, treatment, and services in or for a healthcare organization.
- Only healthcare professionals with verified credentials will be utilized to provide patient care, treatment, and services in/for a healthcare organization during an emergency event.

### I'm employed but I want to volunteer. What is my responsibility to my current employer?

- You must first fulfill your obligations to your employer.
- You must make necessary arrangements with your employer in order to take the time to volunteer. We recognize that your employer may have particular needs.
- The conditions under which an employee will be released to volunteer in an emergency remain between the employer and the employee.

### I have an out-of-state license. Am I still eligible to register in the volunteer register?

- Yes. However, the system is only verifying in-state licenses right now. This means you may be approved as a non-medical group member.

### How will workers compensation be covered?

- Workers compensation costs for activated emergency volunteer health practitioners are paid for by Hawaii Department of Health.
- MRC Unit Coordinators will document and verify volunteer hours for those that have deployed.

### What is the liability of Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners?

- Hawaii Revised Statutes 321-23.3(d) states that except in cases of willful misconduct, the State, any county, or any volunteer emergency medical disaster response personnel engaged in the emergency response to a mass casualty event or disaster condition shall not be liable for the death of or injury to persons.
- You should not be placed in a position by the Unit Coordinator or designee to perform any task or skill that is outside your existing scope of practice or experience. Volunteers should protect themselves by only working within their scope of practice or skill at all times. There are also other liability protections that may apply to MRC volunteers when performing their duties during declared emergencies or disasters.

### I signed up several days ago, why haven't I been called?

- Thank you for volunteering. Please be patient and we will contact you when there is a request that matches your volunteer skillset.
- Although you have not yet received an assignment, you may receive one in the future.

**In a disaster there are multiple workforce networks utilized first before calling upon volunteers. Although you have not yet received an assignment, you may receive one in the future.**

### Are my travel costs and other expenses covered?

- If volunteers are requested from another island or state, airfare and accommodation will be provided. Local volunteers' travel costs such as mileage are not covered.

### What is the scope of practice for the Emergency Healthcare Practitioner Volunteers?

- Volunteers will need to work within scope of Hawaii State Law for each provider type, unless the scope of practice is narrower in their home state, and then the volunteer would need to work within the narrower scope.
- The facility making the workforce request will partner with volunteers to ensure volunteers work within their scope of practice.
- HDOH is authorized to modify scope of practice if needed. This will be determined on a situation-by-situation basis.

### Is financial compensation provided?

- Volunteers through MRC may **not** receive payment for their services.

## Can health practitioners licensed in Hawaii serve as emergency health practitioners?

Only certain professionals have been authorized by the Governor to work in Hawaii in absence of a current license. These professionals include MDs, DOS, AMDs, APRN-RXs, RNs, LPNs who:

- Have a current and active license out-of-state, or
- Were previously licensed pursuant to chapter 457, HRS, or 453, HRS, but who are no longer current and active (like retirees or other people who no longer maintain a nursing or medical license in Hawaii)
- These individuals must also be registered volunteers with the MRC or hired by a state or county agency or facility, or by a hospital, including related clinics and rehabilitation hospitals, nursing home, hospice, pharmacy, or clinical laboratory.

## Who decides where an emergency volunteer health practitioner is assigned and when they are activated?

- The Hawaii Department of Health (HDOH), working with Hawaii Healthcare Emergency Management has the authority to coordinate the provision of health services during an emergency with respect to volunteer health practitioners.
- This includes where they work, for how long they work, and what types of practitioners may practice.

## How does this apply to telehealth and virtual care services?

Licensed Hawaii physicians and advanced practice registered nurses are able to provide telehealth services.

Per the Governor's Supplemental Emergency Proclamation on March 16, 2020, additional professionals have been authorized by the Governor to work in Hawaii in absence of a current license. These professionals include MDs, DOS, AMDs, APRN-RXs, RNs, LPNs who:

- Have a current and active licensed out-of-state, or
- Were previously licensed pursuant to chapter 457, HRS, or 453, HRS, but who are no longer current and active (like retirees or other people who no longer maintain a nursing or medical license in Hawaii)
- These individuals must also be registered volunteers with the MRC or part of or hired by a state or county agency or facility, or by a hospital, including related clinics and rehabilitation hospitals, nursing home, hospice, pharmacy, or clinical laboratory.

**Executive Order (3/23/20)** established that during the Emergency Proclamation, Section 329-41(a)(8) HRS, prohibited acts B – penalties, for the sole and limited purpose of enabling authorized physicians practicing telehealth as provided in section 453-1.3, HRS, to issue prescriptions for controlled substances. Such physicians must otherwise comply with all other requirements of Chapter 329, HRS.

**Executive Order (3/29/20)** authorized physicians under section 453-1.3, HRS, practice of telehealth, to the extent necessary to allow individuals currently and actively licensed pursuant to chapter 453, HRS, to engage in telehealth without an in-person consultation or a prior existing physician-patient relationship; and to the extent necessary to enable out-of-state physicians, osteopathic physicians, and physician assistants with a current and active license, or those who were previously licensed pursuant to chapter 453, HRS, but who are

no longer current and active, to engage in telehealth in Hawai'i without a license, in person consultation, or prior existing physician-patient relationship, provided that they have never had their license revoked or suspended and are hired by a state or county agency or facility or by a hospital, including related clinics and rehabilitation hospitals, nursing home, hospice, pharmacy, or clinical laboratory.

## What happens if a volunteer gets sick while activated?

The HDOH will brief activated volunteers at the beginning of their assignment, including emergency contact information and what to do if they get sick.

## Will a volunteer have to be quarantined after they have served?

- It depends on the situation and exposure. Each volunteer situation will be assessed and volunteers should also review the most current [Interim U.S. Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Healthcare Personnel with Potential Exposure in a Healthcare Setting to Patients with 2019 Novel Coronavirus](#).

## How do I find out more about local Hawaii Medical Reserve Corps groups?

- Visit <https://health.hawaii.gov/prepare/mrc/>

# Background

## Our Volunteers

Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers include **medical and public health professionals**, such as physicians, nurses, physician assistants, pharmacists, dentists, veterinarians, and epidemiologists. Many **other community members** also support the MRC, such as interpreters, chaplains, office workers, and legal advisors.

## MRC Organization and Leadership

The MRC is organized into community-based units located throughout the United States and its territories. The program is directed at the local, regional, state, and national levels.

At the local level, each MRC unit is led by an MRC Unit Coordinator, who matches community needs—for emergency medical response and public health initiatives—with volunteer capabilities. Local coordinators are also responsible for building partnerships, ensuring the sustainability of the local unit, and managing the volunteer resources.

## Local

Each MRC unit is led by an MRC unit coordinator, who matches community emergency response and public health needs with volunteer capabilities. Unit coordinators are also responsible for building partnerships with other community organizations, ensuring the sustainability of their MRC unit, and managing volunteer resources.