



GEORGIA VOLUNTEER HEALTH CARE PROGRAM (AKA Health Share Volunteers in Medicine Act)

In 2005, the General Assembly passed House Bill 166, the "Health Share" Volunteers in Medicine Act, which created the Georgia Volunteer Health Care Program. This law authorizes the State of Georgia via the Department of Community Health (DCH) to offer state-sponsored Sovereign Immunity (SI) protection to uncompensated, licensed health care professionals who provide donated care to eligible patients. The state will be responsible for litigation as long as the volunteer health care professional acted within the scope of services. There will be limited control of the program to ensure state liability protection to providers.

Three Acts (O.C.G.A. § 43-1-28, O.C.G.A. § 43-11-52, and O.C.G.A. § 43-34-45.1) were also created to allow health care professionals who are retired or licensed in another state the ability to obtain a special license in order to volunteer in one of the free clinics.

An eligible patient is defined as:

- A person who is Medicaid eligible under Georgia law, or
- A person who is without health or dental coverage and
- A person whose income is at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), or
- A client of DCH or Department of Human Resources who meet income criteria and income is at or below 200 percent of the FPL.

All licensed volunteer health care professionals will be considered a "State Officer or Employee" by signing an agreement with the DCH. A licensed health care professional may volunteer in a free clinic and/or his or her own private office as long as the required paperwork for the patient is completed by a designated DCH volunteer (see below).

The volunteers (support staff) who will be completing paperwork to determine a patient's eligibility for the program and providing notice to the patient will be considered as DCH volunteers. These volunteers are normally housed in the free medical and/or dental clinic and may or may not be compensated.

The staff consists of a director, administrative assistant, and six Regional Volunteer Coordinators (RVC). The RVCs will be located in Gainesville, Savannah, Macon, Atlanta, Augusta, and Albany and is responsible for a number of counties. Their duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Assists with setting up volunteer medical/dental clinics and work with existing clinics.
- Credentials and contracts with licensed health care professionals.
- Processes the paperwork, trains, and supervises the DCH volunteers completing the financial eligibility and referral forms for the patients.
- Conducts quality assurance reviews on the financial eligibility and referral forms.

The departmental forms, agreement, policies and procedures manual, and the rules have been approved by DCH's Division of Legal Services. The coordinators are working with the existing clinics that provide donated services by uncompensated licensed health care professionals. Agreements and applications will be sent to the licensed volunteers, and when the paperwork is returned, the coordinator will credential the provider and enter him or her into a database. Should a provider be on probation or suspension or have sanctions from Medicare or Medicaid, then he or she will not be able to volunteer for the program. License checks will be conducted on a yearly basis.

The coordinators will also process the paperwork for the persons who will be completing the financial eligibility and referral forms in order to utilize them as DCH volunteers. Once the paperwork has been processed, then in depth training on completing these forms will be conducted. Once the DCH volunteers have been trained, a monthly/quarterly/yearly quality assurance review will be completed.