



Ensuring Volunteers' Health During & After Service

Peace Corps' top priorities are the health and safety of Volunteers. Over the past five years, the Peace Corps has undertaken one of the most extensive reform efforts in the agency's history.

To improve the quality of health care and support for both current and returned Volunteers, the Peace Corps has:

- Established and promoted a direct line to medical professionals at Peace Corps headquarters for current and returned Volunteers who have concerns, questions and comments about their health care. Volunteers currently in service can contact the Quality Improvement Unit at qualitynurse@peacecorps.gov. Returned Volunteers can contact the Post Service Unit at psu@peacecorps.gov.
- Enhanced the overall quality of medical care provided to Volunteers by improving the supervision, hiring, credentialing and management of Peace Corps medical officers at each post. Peace Corps has upgraded technical guidance on a range of medical topics, including sexual assault, malaria suppression, injury and trauma, and mental health.
- Created a Health Care Quality Assurance Council to oversee, monitor and report on the quality of Peace Corps health services.
- Strengthened policy and guidelines for malaria prevention and treatment. Volunteers meet individually with their Peace Corps Medical Officer to discuss the risks, benefits and side effects of the malaria suppression medications available to them. Volunteers are then given a choice of medication, depending on their location and whether they prefer a daily or weekly regimen.
- Sponsored a study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on improving malaria prevention and compliance with anti-malarial medications among Peace Corps Volunteers. In response, the agency has highlighted strategies at pre-service training to help Volunteers remember to take their medications. In addition, a video on malaria prevention jointly produced and disseminated by the Peace Corps and the U.S. Department of State has been incorporated into a global education campaign on malaria prevention.
- Conducted extensive analysis of post-service Volunteer healthcare issues and collaborated with the U.S. Department of Labor to create solutions that address concerns related to Volunteer claims under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA). Peace Corps has established a strong working relationship with the U.S. Department of Labor to improve FECA communication and streamline processes.

- Hired new staff in the Peace Corps' Post Service Unit to accelerate FECA case resolutions. Peace Corps hired an additional billing specialist who has been trained by the U.S. Department of Labor on FECA billing processes and now works closely with returned Volunteers on their claims. Peace Corps has also hired an additional nurse case manager to assist returned volunteers with long-standing FECA claims or challenges with their claims, as well as to track complicated new FECA claims after they have been fully transitioned into the Department of Labor workers' compensation system.
- Reached an agreement with the U.S. Department of Labor that allows for several medical conditions to now be treated by the Peace Corps without prior approval, helping to make the process more efficient for many returned Volunteers.
- Began proactively providing referral forms, known as PC 127 forms, that guarantee coverage for readjustment counseling to all Volunteers upon their Close of Service, so they are readily available as needed when Volunteers return home.
- Reformed medical evacuation procedures so all Volunteers who are medically evacuated to Washington, D.C., are met at the airport by a Peace Corps representative and have a choice of providers for their care. Medically evacuated Volunteers are encouraged to provide feedback to the agency on their experience to ensure the quality of the process.
- Hired a nurse case manager who specializes in sexual assault services to oversee the medical care provided to medically evacuated Volunteers following incidents of crime.
- Expanded the expertise of Peace Corps staff in the Office of Health Services. Staff now has specific expertise in theory, research and treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental health consequences resulting from traumatic events. Peace Corps Counseling and Outreach staff, which includes trainers in evidence-based treatments for PTSD, trains fellow Peace Corps staff so they are equipped to offer PTSD-related services to Volunteers. These staff members have experience working with organizations like the American Psychological Association as well as members of the U.S. military.
- Trained Peace Corps Medical Officers, safety and security staff, and sexual assault response liaisons – all based in the field – on PTSD and trauma informed care at the agency's continuing medical education conferences. The training educated staff on research and treatment of PTSD and prepared them to identify when Volunteers are in need and deliver high-quality support.
- Started the implementation process for an electronic medical records system that will improve the quality of care by giving Peace Corps Medical Officers better access to Volunteers' medical files and allow for real-time oversight. The system will provide valuable data that will help inform the agency's continuing medical education and training programs.
- Peace Corps leadership has chartered a "Post-Service Task Force" to review issues related to RPCV's health needs after service and outline steps that the agency can take to improve health services for RPCVs.