



# UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE COMMISSIONED CORPS



## Answering the Call: *Commissioned Corps vs. Civil Service*

More than 6,500 Commissioned Corps officers work on the front lines of public health — fighting disease, conducting research, and caring for patients in underserved communities. Corps officers protect, promote and advance the health and safety of our nation by serving in a wide range of health related specialties within over 20 federal departments and agencies. While these positions are able to be filled by civil servants, you may decide you want to be an officer in the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps. Both career paths are commendable; below are items to consider when comparing both roles.

**For further recruitment questions, visit [usphs.gov](https://usphs.gov) or contact 1.888.225.3302.**

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<b>Readiness</b>	
<p>All officers must meet basic readiness standards to include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer to Readiness Webpage at: <a href="https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/DCCPR_readiness_and_deployment_m.aspx">https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/DCCPR_readiness_and_deployment_m.aspx</a></li> <li>• Medical and age requirements to join the Corps</li> <li>• Obtain a complete medical examination every 5 years</li> <li>• Annual Physical Fitness Test (APFT): <a href="https://dcp.psc.gov/CCMIS/RedDog/REDDOG_APFT_m.aspx">https://dcp.psc.gov/CCMIS/RedDog/REDDOG_APFT_m.aspx</a></li> <li>• Current certification in a Basic Life Support (BLS) program approved by the PHS</li> <li>• Current immunizations</li> <li>• Successful completion of all readiness training modules</li> <li>• Current professional license/certification/registration appropriate for discipline</li> <li>• Verified Weight Report and annual record of height/weight standards and body mass index (BMI) <a href="https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/weightstandards_m.aspx">https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/weightstandards_m.aspx</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current professional license/certification/registration appropriate for discipline</li> </ul>
<b>Deployment</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commissioned Corps officers deploy in support of public health response for natural and man-made disasters</li> <li>• Commissioned Corps officers deploy at any time to fulfill public health missions; however, each agency has their own deployment and determination processes</li> <li>• Commissioned Corps officers may or may not be deploy in a role related to their specialty (e.g., an epidemiologist may serve as a logistics officer)</li> <li>• Commissioned Corps officers may join a specialized deployment team to fit their interests and availability</li> <li>• Commissioned Corps officers are not eligible for credit or compensatory travel time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some civil service employees may deploy for disaster responses, outbreaks, and other investigations</li> <li>• If a civil service employee is deployed and accrues time beyond normal working hours, he or she may be eligible for compensation time</li> </ul>
<b>Officer Basic Course (OBC)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officer Basic Course (OBC) provides training in the values and skills necessary to represent the Surgeon General as a Commissioned Officer. This two-week course is an orientation to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and life as a uniformed officer in the USPHS. For more information visit: <a href="https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/training/TRAINING_obcdates_m.aspx">https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/training/TRAINING_obcdates_m.aspx</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not applicable</li> </ul>

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**Uniform**

- As one of the 7 uniformed branches, honorable wear of the uniform, following regulation is **mandatory**
  - A one-time \$250 uniform allowance is provided
- Uniforms:**
- Officers must own and maintain all required components of the Service Dress Blue (SDB) and the Operational Dress Uniform (ODU)
  - Many officers wear Service Khaki (SK) and is required for OBC attendance
- Other uniform notes:**
- Agencies may permit or restrict wear of certain uniforms as authorized by the local uniform authority

- Not applicable

**Pay**

- Total compensation varies depending on factors such as education and training, professional experience, dependents, and geographic location of duty station
  - A USPHS officer’s base pay, coupled with a generous assortment of nontaxable income and benefits, provides a very competitive compensation package that increases with years of service and promotions
- Other financial benefits:**
- Accession bonuses may be available for certain health professions
  - Moving expenses to each duty station and back to Home of Record upon separation or Home of Selection upon retirement will be paid
  - May keep current state of residency (i.e., taxes, school)
  - Tax-free allowances for housing (Basic Allowance for Housing) and meals (Basic Allowance for Subsistence)
  - Active duty benefits and discounts
  - Malpractice insurance covered under position
- Resources:**
- Uniformed Service Compensation Calculator:  
<http://militarypay.defense.gov/Calculators/RMCCalculator.aspx>  
*This calculation is an estimate and does not represent the exact amount an officer receives. This calculation does not include any special pays for which an officer may qualify. Special pays will be determined on an individual basis as training, experience and board certification are verified during the application process.*

- Employees are paid using a variety of Governmentwide pay programs
  - Entrance grade and starting pay depends on the level of experience, education and complexity of the position applied for
  - Annual raises and locality pay adjustments are available
- Resources:**  
 Pay schedules and more information on the OPM pay scales available at:  
<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>

## Retirement

- The Blended Retirement System (BRS) is effective as of January 1, 2018:
  - If you are Called to Active Duty after DEC 31 2017, you will be automatically enrolled in the BRS.
  - The BRS will allow service members to receive automatic and matching Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) contributions, mid-career compensation incentives (after 12 years of service, a cash payment of 2.5 months of basic pay for extending service for 4 more years, and monthly full retired pay annuities for life after 20 years of service:  $[2\%] \times [\text{years served}] \times [\text{retired pay base}]$  — average of your highest 36 months of basic pay)
  - Under BRS, the Department of Defense (DoD) will automatically contribute 1% of your basic pay to your TSP after 60 days of service. You'll begin to see matching contributions (up to an additional 4% when you contribute at least 5%) at the start of 3 years of service. Both the DoD automatic 1% and the matching contributions continue through to the completion of 26 years of service
- Officers who retire from the Corps are eligible to accept a position as an employee in the regular government civil service system
- There are several types of retirement options and eligibility requirements offered
- TSP: A retirement savings plan similar to a 401(k) plan\*. Advantages include:
  - Automatic payroll deductions
  - Diversified choice of investment options, including: professionally designed lifestyle funds
  - A choice of tax treatments for contributions:
    - Traditional** (pre-tax) contributions and tax-deferred investment earnings, and
    - Roth** (after-tax) contributions with tax-free earnings at retirement if IRS requirements are satisfied
- The federal government makes additional contributions and may provide matching funds
- After leaving the federal government, employees may leave the funds where they are, or transfer them to another retirement service
  - More on TSP at:  
<http://www.tsp.gov>
- Those who transfer to civil service from the Corps, they may be eligible for some retirement credit. <https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/csrs-information/creditable-service/>

\*The same TSP used by civilians is equivalent to that used by the uniformed services

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### Healthcare

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commissioned Corps officers and their dependents are covered by TRICARE 's family of programs which offers comprehensive health and dental benefits. For the several plan options within TRICARE refer to: <a href="https://www.tricare.mil/Plans/HealthPlans">https://www.tricare.mil/Plans/HealthPlans</a></li> <li>• Officers within 50 miles, or one hour, of a Military Treatment Facility (MTF) are <b>required</b> to receive care there. They are automatically covered under the TRICARE Prime (TP) benefits, but are required to complete a TP enrollment form. Officers who live and work more than 50 miles, or an hour drive time from an MTF, are required to enroll in TRICARE Prime Remote (TPR)</li> <li>• For active duty officers, (and dependents enrolled in TP or TPR) there is no co-pay for doctor visits or prescriptions</li> <li>• Dependents do not have to use the MTFs. Refer to web site above for the different plans available to dependents</li> <li>• Officers are covered overseas and may go to MTFs or a US embassy for care. <a href="https://www.tricare.mil/Plans/HealthPlans/TPO">https://www.tricare.mil/Plans/HealthPlans/TPO</a></li> <li>• For more information, visit: <b>TRICARE</b> <a href="http://tricare.mil/">http://tricare.mil/</a></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees select a health care plan through the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program</li> <li>• Wide selection of health care plans available. Employees may choose between consumer-driven and high deductible plans offering catastrophic risk protection with higher deductibles, health savings/reimbursable accounts and lower premiums, or fee-for-service (FFS) plans, and their PPO, or HMO if they live (or sometimes if they work) within the area serviced by the plan</li> <li>• Employees pay for the cost of the plan (which is listed on the website)</li> <li>• For more information, visit the Office of Personnel Management at: <a href="https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/healthcare/">https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/healthcare/</a></li> </ul> |
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### Dental Benefits

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officers are covered through the USPHS Active Duty Dental Program. Current contractor: Delta Dental <a href="https://www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Dental/ADDental">https://www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Dental/ADDental</a></li> <li>• Coverage for most diagnostic and preventive, restorative, periodontics, endodontic, oral surgery, prosthetic and emergency services are paid at 100% for in-network providers</li> <li>• Dependents are covered under the TRICARE Dental Program plan with a monthly premium. Current contractor: United Concordia. <a href="https://www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Dental/TDP">https://www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Dental/TDP</a></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varies with the health plan chosen through the FEHB Program; additional insurance may be purchased for self and dependents</li> </ul> |
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### Vision Benefits

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general, TRICARE covers routine eye exams once a year at no cost. Contact lens services are not covered. TRICARE only covers glasses and contacts for certain conditions. (e.g. Infantile glaucoma, Keratoconus)</li> <li>• Active Duty Service Members may be able to get glasses from the optometry clinic at their MTF             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– One standard issue pair of glasses and/or sunglasses</li> <li>– One pair of glasses of choice (depending on availability of frame and color options at MTF)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• TPR can order through Naval Ophthalmic Support and Training Activity. <a href="https://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nosttra/Pages/default.aspx">https://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nosttra/Pages/default.aspx</a></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varies with the health plan chosen through the FEHB Program; additional insurance may be purchased for self and dependents</li> </ul> |
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## Leave

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thirty days of paid annual leave per year</li> <li>• Leave must be taken in one day increments</li> <li>• 10 Federal holidays off annually, depending on assignment</li> <li>• Unlimited paid sick leave; a doctor's note is required for extended periods</li> <li>• If you need to take time off to care for a sick loved one, annual leave must be used</li> <li>• Paid station leave: for use to complete personal activities that would be difficult, if not impossible, to conduct during non-work hours. Station leave (partial day leave) is exclusive to officers, and is not charged against annual leave. Station leave must not be abused and must be approved in advance by the officer's supervisor</li> <li>• Paid administrative leave, examples include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to five days per year for activities related to officer's work (i.e., conferences or trainings)</li> <li>• Three days prior to moving to a new duty station, and three days upon reporting to a new duty station for the purpose of moving and establishing a new household</li> <li>• Up to seven days for house hunting purposes in relation to a geographical change of location</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Officers are not covered by Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)</li> <li>• Compensatory time and overtime are not authorized</li> <li>• Paid maternity leave: 12 weeks beginning the day following hospital discharge for both vaginal and C-section delivery</li> <li>• Paid paternity leave: up to 10 non-chargeable days for a married officer</li> <li>• Paid adoption leave: up to 21 days non-chargeable leave in a calendar year</li> <li>• Paid court leave when:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On jury duty</li> <li>• Witness for U.S. or D.C. government</li> <li>• Witness on behalf of state/local government</li> <li>• Witness on behalf of private party in official capacity; or</li> <li>• Witness on behalf of private party when U.S., D.C., or state government is a party in the suit</li> <li>• Must take annual leave if witness on private party when U.S., D.C., state, or local government is not party to litigation</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A minimum of 13 days of paid annual leave per year, up to a maximum of 26 days (accrued at 4 hours per biweekly pay period for less than 3 years of service; accrued at 6 hours per pay period <math>\geq</math> 3 years but &lt; 15 years; accrued at 8 hours per pay period <math>\geq</math> 15 years of service)</li> <li>• Leave can be taken in increments of 15 minutes</li> <li>• 10 Federal holidays off annually, depending on assignment</li> <li>• Paid sick leave: 13 days per year of sick leave (accrued at 4 hours per biweekly pay period)</li> <li>• Compensatory time, credit hours, and overtime <i>may</i> apply in some circumstances</li> <li>• Paid administrative leave: each agency has the authority and discretion to excuse employees from duty without loss of pay or charge to leave in appropriate circumstances. Some examples of such leave include: return to civilian employment after active duty military service, voting, absence directly related to the department or agency's mission, professional development, etc.</li> <li>• Maternity leave: a combination of earned annual and sick leave, and unpaid leave</li> <li>• Employees are covered under FMLA: eligible employees may take unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons with continuation of group health insurance coverage under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave. Eligible employees are entitled to twelve work weeks of leave in a 12-month period for:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Birth of a child and to care for the newborn child within one year of birth, for more info visit: <a href="https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/leave-administration/fact-sheets/handbook-on-leave-and-workplace-flexibilities-for-childbirth-adoption-and-foster-care.pdf">https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/leave-administration/fact-sheets/handbook-on-leave-and-workplace-flexibilities-for-childbirth-adoption-and-foster-care.pdf</a></li> <li>• Adoption and/or foster care</li> <li>• To care for spouse, child, or parent</li> <li>• Any qualifying emergency arising out of the fact the employee's spouse, son, daughter, or parent is a covered military member on "covered active duty;" or 26 work weeks of leave during a single 12-month period to care for a covered service member with a serious injury or illness if the eligible employee is the service member's spouse, son, daughter, parent, or next of kin military caregiver leave. Refer to: <a href="http://www.dol.gov">www.dol.gov</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Paid court leave (same rules as Commissioned Corps apply)</li> </ul> |
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### Disability

- An active duty Commissioned Corps officer who is found unfit to perform the duties of his/her grade, category or office due to one or more physical/mental conditions that are permanent or may become permanent AND the condition is service incurred or aggravated is eligible for disability retirement
- Commissioned Corps officers are also eligible for:
  - Low-cost life insurance
  - TRICARE For Life, wraparound coverage, available to all Medicare-eligible TRICARE beneficiaries upon retirement from the Corps:  
**<http://www.tricare.mil/tfl/>**
  - Veteran's Affairs benefits, such as survivor and disability benefits, home loans, and burial allowances: **<http://www.va.gov>**
- Employees qualify for FMLA
- Disability insurance is available to purchase for a fee. This insurance can pay up to 65% of the employee's salary while they are out of work

### Life Insurance

- Commissioned Corps officers are automatically insured under full-time Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI) up to the maximum of \$400,000
- Spouses and dependent children are eligible for Family Servicemember's Group Life Insurance (FSGLI), of which the Commissioned Corps officer pays the premium for spousal coverage and dependent children are covered at no cost
- FSGLI provides a maximum of \$100,000 for spouses, not to exceed the Servicemember's coverage amount, and \$10,000 for dependent children
- **<http://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/index.asp>**
- Certain companies cater specifically to insurance needs of those on active duty who elect to obtain their own group or individual coverage, such as Navy Mutual Aid Association and United Services Automobile Association (USAA)
- Most civil service employees are eligible for the Federal Employee's Group Life Insurance Program (FEGLI)
- In most cases, if you are a new federal employee, you are automatically covered by basic life insurance under FEGLI.
- In addition to basic life insurance, there are three forms of optional insurance you can elect, but you must have basic in order to elect any of the options
- The cost of basic insurance is shared between you and the Government. You pay 2/3 of the total cost and the Government pays 1/3
- Your age does not affect the cost of basic insurance
- You pay the full cost of optional insurance, and the cost depends on age
- **<https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/life-insurance/>**

## Other Perquisites

- Military discounts offered through various businesses including cell phone providers, travel, lodging, and other purchases: <https://www.military.com/discounts>
- Space Available (Space-A) flights: Low-cost travel for officers and their spouse/dependents domestically and internationally when there are available seats on DoD owned or controlled aircraft. This travel option is not available from all bases. For additional Space-A information visit: <http://www.militaryliving.com>
- For additional travel perks (Disney tickets, five star resorts worldwide, etc.) for the uniformed services: <http://www.military.com>
- Base Exchange (BX)/Post Exchange (PX), Commissary access: clothing, goods, furniture, appliances, and groceries can be purchased tax-free
- USAA: A banking/insurance system for uniform service members, former military, and their dependents: <http://www.usaa.com>
- Eligible for Service Members Civil Relief Act (SCRA). This is a federal law providing protections for members of the uniformed services as they enter active duty. It covers issues such as rental agreements, security deposits, prepaid rent, eviction, installment contracts, credit card interest rates and fee waivers, mortgage interest rates, mortgage foreclosure, civil judicial proceedings, automobile leases, life insurance, health insurance, and income tax payments: <https://scra-w.dmdc.osd.mil/scra/#/home>
- Some costs of adoption may be covered: [https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/CCPM22\\_1\\_6.pdf](https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/CCPM22_1_6.pdf)
- Eligible for the Montgomery GI Bill and the Post 9/11 GI Bill and transferability to spouse and dependents: [https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/handouts\\_forms.asp](https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/handouts_forms.asp)
- Eligible for VA home loan benefits: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/>
- Eligible for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program after making 120 qualifying monthly payments under a qualifying repayment plan while working full-time for a qualifying employer: <https://studentaid.ed.gov>
- Government employee discounts offered through various businesses including cell phone providers, travel, lodging, and other purchases: <https://www.fedsmith.com/2018/05/03/best-discounts-government-employees-everything-travel-electronics/>
- Eligible for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program after making 120 qualifying monthly payments under a qualifying repayment plan while working full-time for a qualifying employer: <https://studentaid.ed.gov>

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### Future Jobs

- It is the officer's responsibility to locate job positions following the typical career progression to include increased rank, leadership, and responsibility
- Officers may apply to a variety of positions throughout the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and certain non-HHS Federal agencies <https://usphs.gov/aboutus/agencies/>
- PHS officers do not always need to apply through USA Jobs, but many positions are available through the website: <http://www.usajobs.gov>
- Federal employees have preference over non-federal employees when applying for certain positions
- Some positions may be applied for through USA Jobs: <http://www.usajobs.gov>

### Work Hours & Outside Work/Volunteering Activities

- Officers are considered on-duty 24/7, thus no overtime/compensation time. Officers typically work the routine hours for their job/office. Officer's branch/department may have specific hours (tour of duty) they would like for them to work, and some may be very flexible
- With supervisor approval, some officers have the option to include telework and alternative work schedules (AWS)
- A Request for Approval of Outside Activities (HHS-520) should be submitted to your supervisor for activities taking place during work hours or requiring your skill in a setting outside of the government
- Ineligible to join a union, but support by the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) <http://www.coausphs.org/>
- Employees' tour of duty is set-up with their supervisor
- With supervisor approval, some civilians have the option to include telework and alternative work schedules (AWS)
- A Request for Approval of Outside Activities (HHS-520) should be submitted to your supervisor for activities taking place during work hours or requiring your skill in a setting outside of the government
- Eligible to join and be represented by a union

### Political Issues

- Officers are required to sign a loyalty oath
- Officers may be a conscientious objector to participation in war; however, this may impact their position in the Commissioned Corps
- Corps directives on political activities restrictions and must comply with the Hatch Act: restrictions of political activity by all federal employees
- Employees are required to sign a loyalty oath
- Employees may not campaign for political candidates at work, and are generally discouraged from voicing strong political opinions in the workplace
- Must comply with the Hatch Act: restrictions of political activity by federal employees

### Additional Benefits

- General information on active duty/military benefits at <http://militarypay.defense.gov/benefits>
- General information on federal civil service benefits at <http://www.opm.gov>