

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN OFFICERS COMMITTEE

of the

United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2023

Executive Committee Members

Chair: CDR Chaolong Qi
Chair-Elect: CDR Sophia Park
Executive Secretary: LCDR Sophie Soo
Corresponding Secretary: LCDR Jen Eng
Treasurer: CDR Doan Singh
MOLC Representatives: LCDRs Sally Doan & Tramara Dam
Leadership & Strategic Planning:
LCDR Huan Tran

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APAOC Chair's Corner

Dear APAOC members,

Time flies when we immerse ourselves in productivity and joy. As we find ourselves at the midpoint of Operational Year 2023, I hope that each one of you has achieved remarkable feats and is enjoying the summer season. Amidst your unwavering dedication to our missions, please be sure to strive for a harmonious balance between work and life, and take opportunities to relax and recharge.

As the APAOC Chair, I am blessed with the privilege of witnessing firsthand the extraordinary efforts our members put forth, both as individuals and as a united force. Our journey through the first half of 2023 has culminated in several transformative initiatives.

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APAOC Chair's Corner *Continued*

During the Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month in May, APAOC hosted and co-sponsored three major events including:

- The 3rd APAOC Annual AANHPI Heritage Month Celebration on May 19 with a theme on “Celebrating AANNHPI Women Leaders” by the Public Relations Subcommittee Chairs, LCDRs Kathleen Tisdale and William Chang, their respective alternates, CDR Hai Lien Phung and LCDR Morgan Lee, and team member LT Jenny Sung. We were thrilled that RDML Aisha K. Mix, Senior Advisor of the Minority Officers Liaison Council (MOLC) and Chief Nurse Officer of USPHS, and RDML Emil Wang, Chief Engineer Officer of USPHS, both attended the event. CAPT Juliette Taylor, APAOC Senior Advisor, shared her wisdom through a heartfelt keynote speech with 65 participants from multiple agencies and PHS categories (see pages 18-19 for further details).
- The NIH 2nd Annual AANHPI Health Research Conference, with CDR Doan Singh and LT Jin Qin representing APAOC in planning and presenting at the [virtual conference](#). CDR Doan Singh also represented APAOC in co-authoring [a NIH Record Publication in its June 9th issue](#). In addition to summarizing the successful conference, the article

also highlights USPHS and APAOC's effort on advancing health equity.

- "Cancer Health Disparities in Asian American and Pacific Islander Populations" by LT Jin Qin, ScD, MS, on May 3, 2023.
- "Asian Pacific American Officers Committee Advancing Health Equity in Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Community" by CDR Doan N. Singh, PharmD, MS, ASQ CQA, on May 4, 2023.
- The [Vivek H. Murthy Distinguished Lecture Series for Public Health Leadership](#) on May 17, 2023, with 506 live participants. In the event, VADM Murthy recognized Dr. Dave Choksy, Professor at NYU and previous health commissioner of New York City, for his leadership in addressing trust, misinformation, pandemic responses and mental health impacting various communities.

APAOC had a strong showing at the 2023 USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium in Tulsa, OK. During the pre-conference Health Equity Seminar on May 8, 2023, nine APAOC officers presented or participated in eight sessions. The seminar titled: “Uniting to Advance Health Equity and Promote Cultural Humility within the Commissioned

Corps” was a great collaboration among the MOLC with all four Chartered Minority Advisory Groups (CMAGs), the Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity Advisory Group (SOAGDAG), and the Social Work Professional Advisory Group (SWPAG). It yielded great impact on the Commissioned Corps and was among the special highlights by the Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) on May 24, 2023. APAOC officers' contributions include:

- LCDR Tramara Dam and CDR Chaolong Qi introducing MOLC and APAOC, respectively.
- CDR David Huang presenting “The US Health Equity Landscape”.
- LCDR Evelyn Hong and CDR Doan Singh representing APAOC and presenting in the session of “History of Racism in Medicine and Public Health”.
- LCDR Marleen Tran representing APAOC in the panel discussion on “Experiences, Lessons learned, and Resources from Officers Engaged in IDEA Initiatives”.
- LCDR Trami Nguyen representing APAOC in the session of “CMAG Engagement and Cultural Ambassador Program”, while CDR Tran Trang presiding the session.
- CAPT Michelle Tsai and LCDR Tramara Dam presenting “It

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APAOC Chair's Corner *Continued*

Takes a Village: Changing the Narrative of Youth Mental Health in Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Populations”.

In addition, LCDRs Marleen Tran and Trami Nguyen led presenting the APAOC poster during the general session of the USPHS Symposium:

- LCDR Marleen Tran, LCDR Tramara Dam, LCDR Evelyn Hong, CDR Doan Singh, and LCDR Trami Nguyen. [APAOC's Efforts in Protecting, Promoting, and Advancing Youth Mental Health in Asian Americans.](#)

The USPHS Symposium proved to be an invaluable platform for fostering social connections and networking among our officers. A special commendation goes to LT Jing Tassone, whose exceptional organizational skills led to the resounding success of the APAOC Social event on May 8, 2023. This gathering saw the enthusiastic participation of numerous APAOC members and fellow officers, including RDML Emil Wang, further strengthening the bonds within our community (see page 24 for further details). As we reflect on this memorable occasion, let us carry the essence of these interactions with us, embracing the power of unity and collaboration. Such connections not only enhance our personal and professional growth but also inspire us to make a positive

impact on the lives we touch through our service. A recent example of such efforts is the collaboration between the APAOC AAPI Cultural Support Workgroup (led by CDR Nicole Pascua and LT Jayson Hsieh) and SOAGDAG on a Post-Movie Watch Party Discussion on June 11, 2023, for Everything Everywhere All at Once (see pages 22-23 for further details).

Congratulations to the 2023 APAOC Honor Awards recipients, CDR Eric Zhou (RADM Samuel Lin Award), CDR Nicole Pascua (RADM Kenneth Moritsugu Award), and LCDR Ruby Leong (CAPT Allan Lock Award), for receiving these well-deserved awards at the MOLC Award Ceremony during the USPHS Symposium. Special thanks to the Awards & Recognition Subcommittee Chairs, CDR Kent Bui and LCDR Ji Hyun LaRose, for leading the awards process. We also extend congratulations to LT Mary Luc for receiving the Junior Officer of the Year Award by the Public Health Professional Advisory Group. All of you have made APAOC proud.

The Community Engagement Workgroup (CEWG), guided by the exceptional leadership of the Chairs (CDR Quynh-Van Tran and LCDR Miaka Huynh) has been a driving force of community outreach events in all the regions to serve the AANHPI communities and promote the Surgeon General's priorities (see pages 12-17 for further details).

Some highlights of these events include:

- May 8, 2023: 988 Promotion Youth Service Tulsa OK – led by CDR Jessica Steinert
- May 20, 2023: PACE & APAOC community event at the AAPI Festival Event in Falls Church, VA – led by CDR Yen Anh Bui and LCDR Trami Nguyen
- May 21, 2023: Asian American Health Initiative (AAHI) AAPI Heritage Month Celebration in Germantown, MD – led by CDR Sophia Park and LCDR Sylvia Park
- May 17, 19, 24, 2023: AANHPI Heritage Month Celebration, New York City, NY – led by CDR Jerry Zee
- June 10, 2023: 125th Philippine Independence Celebration in Carson, CA – led by LCDR Benigno Devera
- June 17, 2023: Walk for Rice, Seattle, WA – led by LCDR Melody Sun

Another milestone accomplishment in the CEWG was the launch of the Healthy Mind Initiative (HMI) Training program, developed by APAOC in collaboration with PACE. This training program, led by LT Jin Qin initially and by LCDR Truong Vinh Phung currently in APAOC, provides opportunities for volunteers from both APAOC and PACE/SGET to learn the HMI Lesson Plan for consistently delivering the Lesson Plan to communities nationwide.

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APAOC Chair's Corner *Continued*

Thanks to the timely update by LCDR Truong Vinh Phung, a new HMI flyer became available on the updated [HMI webpage](#) prior to the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders Mental Health Summit on July 20, 2023. CAPT Juliette Taylor, CAPT Michelle Tsai, and LCDR Miaka Huynh represented APAOC in the summit and shared with the attendees on APAOC's experience in HMI. The timely update of the [HMI webpage](#) would not have been possible without the outstanding dedication of our Communications Subcommittee Chaired by LCDRs Evelyn Hong and Garrett Chun. Their excellent leadership also put APAOC on a fast track of migrating our Shared Point portal to All Partners Access Network (APAN) from max.gov, which will be sunseting at the end of 2023. Both LCDRs Hong and Chun are representing APAOC to share their experience in a "Max.gov Replacement Focus Group" convened by the Office of the Surgeon General's (OSG).

I would like to extend congratulation to all the APAOC officers who were selected for promotion in PY2023. Over 40 APAOC members (mainly based on the information in APAOC listserv subscription, see page 5 for further details) including ten current or prior voting members (VM) and six current or prior VM alternates were selected for their well-deserved promotions. As an organization, APAOC takes

immense pride in your accomplishments, and I hope the stage in APAOC made a difference in your hero's journey. As one of the officers selected, I know I have immense gratitude to the opportunity that APAOC provides to me. To those of you who did not cross the magic line this year or are awaiting your turns, know that your contributions are deeply valued by APAOC and our community, regardless of your rank. Your dedications to agency assignments and public health responses, your tireless efforts advancing public health missions, and your APAOC work supporting fellow officers and addressing health disparities in our communities are accomplishments you should forever take pride in, regardless of when certain milestones are reached. We are a community that uplifts one another, and we will always be here to provide support and resources that empower your growth as public health leaders. I strongly encourage you to read and absorb the wisdom of [the open letter from promotion board chairs](#). The last three bullets in the letter are exactly what APAOC has been practicing.

Among the resources that APAOC has been diligently exploring and sharing with our members and fellow officers, two remarkable seminars organized by the Education and Training Subcommittee, led by Chairs LCDR Jason Tu and LT Ying Lin and their respective Alternates LT Michael Tian and LT Jiali He, have stood out:

- April 21, 2023: "Advanced Certification Opportunities for Public Health Service Officers for USPHS officers" by CDR Jennifer Clements, CDR Nancy Tian and LCDR Xiaowu Lu with 236 live participants.
- June 23, 2023: "Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Officers' Awards Program (COAP)" by LCDRs Alesha Harris and Zavera Brandon with 160 live participants.

Indeed, the remarkable accomplishments achieved by our officers in just a few months are a testament to the unwavering dedication and passion that defines APAOC. Your tireless commitment serves as a constant source of inspiration, propelling us forward even in the face of challenges. Moving forward, let us continue to seize every opportunity to connect, support, and uplift one another. Together, we shall forge a path of shared success, celebrating each other's achievements and finding strength in our collective pursuit of excellence. As we spearhead into the latter half of the year, I am filled with anticipation for the opportunities that lie before us. Let's build upon these accomplishments, reaching even greater heights as we work hand in hand to fulfill our missions.

In Officio Salutis,
CDR Chaolong Qi
2023 APAOC Chair



Onward and Upward!

APAOC congratulates the following officers on their recent promotion! Their successful promotion exemplifies their professional achievements, readiness, and deployment skills and the embodiment of the Commissioned Corps' core values of leadership, service, integrity, and excellence.

To Captain (O-6)

Nurse:

Ranjodh Gill

Engineer:

Francis Chua

Leo Angelo Gumapas

Scientist:

Michelle Tsai

Pharmacy:

Reasol Chino

Health Services Officer:

Neelam Ghiya

Denise Morrison

To Commander (O-5)

Nurse:

Elizabeth Kim

Chao Moua

Stacy Yung

Engineer:

Chaolong Qi

Pharmacy:

Catherine Arnatt

Christopher Chong

Pariban Dhanormchitphong

David Eng

Daniel Lee

Eithu Lwin

Doan Singh

Quynh Anh Tran

Rebecca Wong

Health Services Officer:

Nicole Pascua

To Lieutenant Commander (O-4)

Nurse:

Jun Chu

Engineer:

Morgan Lee

Geng Tian

Scientist:

Pushpa Jayasekara

Jueichuan Kang

Hana Kim

Kerui Xu

Veterinary:

Allison Siu

Pharmacy:

Shanly Chen

Miaka Huynh

David Khan

Colleen Kim

Deborah Lai

Nora Lim

Phuong Nguyen

Amy Nham

William Phan

Adena Yau

George Yeh

Health Services Officer:

David Chon

Eugene Song

Therapist:

Zavera Brandon



2023 APAOC Honor Award Recipients

RADM Kenneth Moritsugu Award:

CDR Nicole Pascua



1. What has been your most significant contribution to the Asian American and Pacific Islander community?

I believe my most significant contribution to the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community is exemplified in the work I performed under the auspices of APAOC—specifically the AAPI Cultural Support Workgroup (WG). In 2021 APAOC formed the AAPI Cultural Support WG in response to the increase in racially motivated hate crimes and discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. The WG's mission is to bring awareness about racial discrimination and hate crimes against the AAPI community, provide education and resources, and share informed actions on how to address racial discrimination and hate crimes. To this end, I have been given the opportunity to participate in presentations, develop trainings, and moderate roundtable discussions that brought officers and members of the community together to address the mental and emotional impact of discrimination and hate crimes, as well as to develop solutions that foster allyship, engagement, and open dialogue with other groups.

2. What is a career goal you have?

My main career goal is to engage in opportunities that enhance my professional development as a mental health practitioner. This includes engaging in activities to expand my knowledge of mental illness, recovery, mental health treatment and practices as well as emerging models and programming that address access to care. To this end, I keep abreast of trainings that provide foundational knowledge of mental health illnesses and the populations that suffer disproportionately from these illnesses. I actively volunteer to participate in new Agency or PHS initiatives that are topically focused on mental health. Lastly, I make an effort to connect with Agency staff, other PHS officers, and mentors who are subject matter experts in mental health initiatives.

3. How do you stay motivated during challenging times?

From an agency and PHS -related point-of-view, I try to engage in activities that I find interesting, professionally and personally meaningful. In doing so, I am better able to cope with challenges because I already find value in what I am doing. From a personal standpoint, I cope with challenging or stressful events by putting things into perspective for myself and reframing how I view the stressor. This sometimes takes the form of reminding myself that stressful events or projects are time-limited and that the activity is helping me to 'practice' for similar events in the future. Lastly, I engage in activities that are rewarding—both mentally and physically. This includes spending time with my family and friends, reading fiction books, watching movies, and exercising.

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2023 APAOC Honor Award Recipients

Continued



CAPT Allan Lock Award:

LCDR Ruby Leong

1. *What has been your most significant contribution to the Asian American and Pacific Islander community?*

My most significant contributions to the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AA and NHPI) communities have been through developing policy and conducting research for AA and NHPI patients diagnosed with cancer at my Agency position. Cancer is the leading cause of death for AA and NHPI communities. My involvement includes engaging in research projects and developing policy and guidance for industry for minority patient populations, and ensuring diversity and equity for enrollment of oncology clinical trials. I am also part of the Food and Drug Administration, Oncology Center of Excellence Workgroup for Project ASIATICA (ASian amerIcans, nATive hawaIian, and other paCific islAnders), a newly formed initiative to bring focus and awareness to AA and NHPI cancer patients.

2. *What is a career goal you have?*

My top 3 career goals are to:

- Sustain a rewarding career and extracurricular activities that have a global imprint and make a difference in the lives of patients with cancer daily.
- Nurture mentor and mentee relationships and pay it forward by providing opportunities and helpful advice to other officers.
- Continue to learn and challenge myself by practicing intellectual humility.

3. *How do you stay motivated during challenging times?*

The recent pandemic has put a spotlight on challenging times for working mothers and I go by the following to stay motivated:

- Focus on the positives of the mission, whether it be for my Agency work or family.
- Prioritize self-care – as a mother of two young kids and a demanding career, I can only provide the best care for family and staff by filling my own glass first.
- Stay in touch with colleagues and network of Officers to weather the challenging times together by leaning on each other.



2023 PHPAG Junior Officer of the Year Award Recipient



LT Mary Luc

1. *What has been your most significant contribution to the Asian American and Pacific Islander community?*

Early in my career, I had the honor of volunteering for the Hanoi Association for People with Disabilities where I edited and helped improve the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)'s grant letters, project plans, articles, and website. My team and I collected qualitative data used in a campaign to bring awareness to the needs and challenges of people with disabilities in Vietnam. I helped connect the organization with a university to establish a sustainable volunteer program.

2. *What is a career goal you have?*

One of my career goals is to increase my knowledge in health communications. I would like to work towards obtaining my Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) and Master Certified Health Education Specialist (MCHES) certificates. Clear communication is required in all aspects of life and is a way to make health information accessible. I also enjoy supporting mentorship programs for early career public health professionals and hope to continue my work with mentorship programs inside and outside of USPHS.

3. *How do you stay motivated during challenging times?*

I stay motivated by reminding myself that challenging times will pass and that I will overcome obstacles with persistence and a little help from others. As a daughter of parents who were refugees, I try to channel their strength, resilience, and resourcefulness in all that I do and hope to make them proud.



LT Luc was awarded the Junior Officer of the Year 2023 Award by HSPAC's Public Health Professional Advisory Group for exemplary commitment and contributions to the fields of Public Health, preparedness and response, and global health.



USPHS Officers Assist Marine Corps Toys for Tots in Frederick, MD

By: CDRs Harold Sano, Candido Alicea, and Vandna Kishore

Toys for Tots began in 1947 inspired by the wife of Marine Corps Reserve Major Bill Hendricks due to her desire to donate handcrafted dolls to children in need. Unable to find an organization to donate the dolls to, Major Hendricks and the Marines in his California reserve unit, instead collected and distributed 5,000 toys. As a result, the following year the Commandant directed the Toys for Tots program to be implemented at all Marine Reserve Sites, transforming it into a national community action program known today as the Marine Corps Toys for Tots Program. Seventy-six years later, on December 10, 2022, twenty-two USPHS Commissioned Corps officers volunteered for the annual Marine Corps Toys for Tots (T4T) in Frederick, MD. CDRs Harold Sano and Candido Alicea organized the five-hour shift coordinating with Marine Staff Sergeant (SSG) Hamilton, the T4T event leader. The Commissioned Corps (CC) officers represented the DC Commissioned Officers Association (DCCOA), as this was the 3rd year DCCOA volunteered at the Frederick T4Ts. CC officers drove from Washington, DC, Silver Spring, Baltimore, and other distant locations to help at the Frederick Toys for Tots Warehouse. The full-time T4T volunteer staff were very happy to have the officers help.

Our shift began at 10 a.m. inside a 30,000 square foot warehouse that had plenty of space to receive giant containers of unopened toys that were either donated or purchased with donated funds. The day that we volunteered, SSG Hamilton, secured over \$20,000 of merchandise from nearby Walmart and Target stores. Donated and purchased toys included action figurines, radio-controlled drones, cars, trains, dolls, board games, stuffed animals, stocking stuffers, and bicycles. The most popular toys were Star Wars figurines and spaceships, Legos sets, and radio-controlled toys. One load of toys was even delivered by an Army tactical vehicle, aka. deuce and a half, during our volunteer shift. Our volunteer team brought in large containers of toys from the receiving dock and separated the toys by child's age group, gender, and type of toy. After organizing the toys, we had the additional task of managing a running tally of the toys processed for inventory as well as making sure that young children received toys that were age appropriate to avoid potential swallowing or safety haz-

ards. An additional measure to cross out price stickers and barcodes using sharpies were enforced to prevent potential returns at the retail establishments. Finally, the toys were moved again for staging purposes in preparation of a 'pick an item' assembly line, where a staff or volunteer would grab a toy(s) and bring it to the family that was registered to pick up toys.

The team stayed busy for the five hours, which included walking, lifting, and moving sorted toys. The officers came prepared in warm comfortable clothing, including good walking shoes. Over the five hours, we processed over 2,000 toys to be handed out in the Frederick community for the 2022 Holidays. Our team of volunteer officers also helped decorate the empty warehouse space into a warm holiday friendly space with seasonal decorations so the families arriving to receive toys would feel they were in a festive space.

This year, SSG Hamilton, indicated the need for extra Spanish translators during the distribution of the toys, a few days prior to the Christmas Holiday. CDR Alicea, and his daughter Veronica, took advantage of this opportunity to follow the progression of the sorted toys to their final destination in the hands of wanting children. The toy distribution was divided into three stages. First, greeting and confirmation of documents for proof of residence and enrollment in the current year's T4T program. The second stage consisted of the validation of the number of participants, ages, and gender. At this stage, families were given a card with the confirmed information to be presented to the T4T staff at the next stage. While waiting their turn to present the card at the next stage, families had a photo-op with Ol' Saint Nick available. At the final stage, the staff would take the presented information card and go shopping in the back of the warehouse where the toys were previously sorted by our volunteers. The number of toys given to each child would depend on the total number of collected toys for that specific age and gender.

This was a most satisfying experience: Christmas shopping at no cost to those who needed it! The selected toys were dropped into a black plastic bag and handed over to the awaiting families. We hope to organize a team of CC officers to help distribute toys to families as well as perform the warehouse duties for the 2023 Marine Corps Toys for Tots next holiday season.

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USPHS Officers Assist Marine Corps Toys for Tots in Frederick, MD

Continued

The following CC officers graciously volunteered for the Frederick, MD, Toys for Tots event making it a huge success.

Event organizers: CDR Harold Sano and CDR Candido Alicea

Volunteers:

CAPT Martin Guardia	LCDR Joseph Allen
CAPT Michael Smith	LCDR Dan Johnson
CDR Jim Barlow	LCDR Nora Lim
CDR LaToya Bonner	LCDR Briana Rider
CDR Robert Horsch	LCDR Kelli Shaffer
CDR Michel Janda	LCDR Bowen Worsley
CDR Vandna Kishore	LCDR Steven Yang
CDR Alister Rubenstein	LT Elizabeth Akoth
CDR Jennifer Tate	LT Jia Leo



USPHS Volunteers at Frederick, MD, Toys for Tots Warehouse



Hurricane Fiona Deployment Experience

By: CDR Kent Bui

Five years after Hurricane Maria caused catastrophic damages in Puerto Rico, the island was struck by another hurricane on Sunday, September 18, 2022. Hurricane Fiona made landfall as a Category 1 storm causing island-wide power outages, damage to structures, and disruption of human services. I deployed to the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) Headquarters to support Hurricane Fiona's response.

The Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response (OHSEPR) leads ACF's support for disaster human services. OHSEPR deployed incident support teams to ACF's Headquarters in Washington, D.C., and field assessment teams in Puerto Rico to conduct targeted and time-limited damage assessments from a sample of keyed ACF-funded human services providers impacted by Hurricane Fiona.

I reported to the Information Management Section (IM) that was responsible for directing information collection, analysis, and dissemination including providing consolidated reports to OHSEPR leadership. IM coordinated with Safety Officers to monitor conditions in Puerto Rico communities where deployed assessment teams worked and disseminated hazard advisories alerts as soon as threats were identified. My daily duties included producing situational reports documenting data assessment and accomplishments for each operational period, reviewing data collected on the impacted jurisdictions and human services providers, and communicating with Section Chiefs on information analyses. Our team developed a final comprehensive analysis report which comprised of all visited ACF-funded service providers (e.g., Head Start centers) across Puerto Rico and assessments on structural and physical disaster-caused damages, changes in provider operations (e.g., reduction in operational hours, staff shortages), and service accessibility, potentially influenced by individuals and households displaced by Hurricane Fiona.

Five years ago, I deployed to San Juan, Puerto Rico to support Hurricane Maria's response. I was rostered for Hurricane Fiona's response on the 5-year anniversary of Hurricane Maria. I am honored and thankful for the opportunity to contribute to disaster response and protect public health and human services.



Left to Right: CAPT Nina Mezju-Nwaba, CDR Kent Bui, CDR Abbas Bandukwala, LCDR Jinean Riley, and LT Christina Waters at ACF's Headquarters in Washington, D.C.



Another Eventful Quarter with CEWG

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Promotion at Youth Services of Tulsa, Tulsa OK – May 8, 2023

Event Lead: CDR Jessica Steinert, CDR Quynh Tran

The OK/TX Region APAOC Community Engagement Workgroup (CEWG) organized a community outreach event to promote the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline on May 8, 2023, to kickoff USPHS Symposium week in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The 988 lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Youth Services of Tulsa is the only Tulsa non-profit organization with a sole focus on youth and young adults up to the age of 24 providing support services, youth development, and counseling to at-risk youth, including runaway youth and those experiencing homelessness. The team provided information on USPHS, APAOC, and the 988 Lifeline. In addition to interacting with the youth, the team assisted with facility activities including making to-go snack packs and organizing the clothing closet.



Participants included: CDR Steinert, CDR Sano, CDR Tran, LCDR Thomas, LCDR Zhou, LCDR Whittington, LCDR Huang, LCDR Huynh, LT Lin, LT Hernandez-Ware, LT Yang, LT He, and Dr. Rachel-Philip.



Another Eventful Quarter with CEWG

Continued

Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders Heritage Month Celebration Brooklyn NY – May 2023

Event Lead: CDR Jerry Zee

CDR Zee and LT Sung from the NY/NJ/PA region of the APAOC Community Engagement Workgroup provided an outreach event presentation during May's Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders Heritage Month Celebration on May 17, 2023 in Brooklyn, NY. Discussions included various topics including an overview of the Inflation Reduction Act and what happens when the COVID-19 public health emergency ends. CDR Zee also led two other similar events during the Heritage Month.



Left to right: CDR Zee, LT Sung

2023 Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Festival, Falls Church VA – May 20, 2023 and Germantown MD, May 21, 2023

Event Lead: CDR Yen Anh Bui, CDR Sophia Park, LCDR Trami Nguyen, LCDR Sylvia Park

The DC/Maryland/Virginia Region of the APAOC Community Engagement Workgroup organized two consecutive events to commemorate Asian American Heritage Month on May 20th in Falls Church, VA, and May 21st in Germantown, MD. The event held on May 20th was a collaborative effort with the regional PACE Northern Virginia team. During both occasions, the team disseminated valuable information to the community regarding several health-related subjects, including mental health, tobacco cessation, handwashing techniques, healthy eating habits, and the life-saving potential of naloxone in opioid overdose situations. The county provided naloxone kits, which were distributed to 50 community members. The diverse team members facilitated the dissemination of educational materials in multiple languages, both in written and spoken forms. Moreover, the APAOC members conducted blood pressure screenings for the community. Twenty-six USPHS officers supported these events hosting more than 1200 community members.

Special thanks to CDR Yen Anh Bui, CDR Sophia Park, LCDR Trami Nguyen, and LCDR Sylvia Park for leading these two events!

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Another Eventful Quarter with CEWG

Continued



Left: LCDRs Cindy Chee and Miaka Huynh providing nutrition and healthy eating education to community members

Above: APAOC Officers providing information on the USPHS and APAOC



LCDR Yajun Jason Tu and LCDR Ji Hyun LaRose providing blood pressure checks to attendees.

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Another Eventful Quarter with CEWG

Continued



APAOC and PACE team members



Another Eventful Quarter with CEWG

Continued

125th Philippine Independence Day Celebration, Carson CA – June 10, 2023

Event Lead: LCDR Benigno Devera

Nine USPHS Officers from the California Region of the APAOC Community Engagement Workgroup along with family and friends attended the event at the Philippine Independence Day Festival in Carson, CA on June 10, 2023. The team discussed current Surgeon General's priorities including improving social connection, youth mental health, workplace well-being, health misinformation, and healthcare worker burnout.



From left to right: LCDR Devera, CDR Nguyen, LCDR Tran, LT Williams, CDR Yambot

Walk for Rice, Seattle WA – June 17, 2023

Event Lead: CDR Amos Chen

Members from the Washington Region of the APAOC Community Engagement Workgroup including four USPHS Regular Corps Officers, one USPHS Reserve Officer, one USPHS retired captain, and four civilian colleagues joined forces to support the “Walk for Rice” community event at Seward Park in Seattle, WA. This was a 2.5-mile walk sponsored by the Asian Counseling and Referral Service, a wellness program that highlights underutilized mental health services among the Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) populations. All officers wore the ODU uniform for PHS visibility and the participants reached out to a local school of social work in a recruiting effort. In addition to networking, the team promoted the Surgeon General's Priorities on mental health and community engagement.

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Another Eventful Quarter with CEWG

Continued

“Walk for Rice” team members:



APAOC 2nd Annual Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month Celebration

By: CDR Hai Lien Phung, LCDR William Chang, and LCDR Kathleen Tisdale

Each year, Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific islander communities across the country celebrate May Heritage Month to bring awareness on the contributions and various issues that these communities are facing. However, have you ever wondered how the May Heritage Month started and why we celebrate during the month of May? Who was/were the trailblazer(s)?

These questions were answered during this year's 2nd annual celebration of the Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI) May Heritage Month, hosted by the APAOC Public Relations (PR) Subcommittee virtually on May 19th, 2023.

This year's theme was Celebrating AANHPI Women Serving in the Community; APAOC showcased inspiring female leaders who were not afraid to realize their full potential and pursue their dreams. Many wonderful Asian American women were highlighted during this year's event, including two dedicated ladies, Jeanie Jew, a staffer on Capitol Hill, and Ruby Moy, a US representative of NY. These two incredible women spearheaded a campaign to get congressional support for the Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month celebration, with the mission of bringing attention the contributions Asian and Pacific Islander Americans have made to the history and culture of the United States.

To align with this year's theme, we had the honor and privilege to have our very own APAOC senior advisor, CAPT Juliette Taylor, serve as our distinguished guest speaker. Did you miss CAPT Taylor's inspiring speech? Do you want to hear words of wisdom from CAPT Taylor? See our mini Q&A session with CAPT Taylor at the end of this article.

The event was a true success! There were approximately 65 attendees from different organizations and agencies. The Public Relations Subcommittee would like to thank all the organizers and participants who celebrated this important event!

APAOC's mini Q&A with CAPT Taylor:

APAOC: Are you a tiger mom yourself or you find a balance after learning from your parents? Any tips to share?

CAPT Taylor: You'll have to ask my kids! I would like to think that I am not, but I do have high standards. It is not easy finding that right balance of encouragement and discipline. Tips:

- Allowing kids to have choices and opportunities to learn from mistakes as early on as possible. Creating a safe space to do so. Modeling behaviors to show we still make mistakes and should right the wrong.
- Kids needs structure that makes sense. This may mean saying no to many things. Finding the right balance of "tiger mom" rules and allowing kids to choose/make decision/learn from natural consequences is not easy.

APAOC: We know that you were a founding mother of Alpha Sigma Rho, the first Asian sorority in Georgia, during your undergraduate days. What would you attribute to as your inspiration from a young age to pursue the strength in unity across racial divides, and to fight racism and discrimination through education and cultural awareness campaigns?

CAPT Taylor: Racism and discrimination are rooted in ignorance and bias. Education is the antidote to ignorance. In these cultural awareness events, which are teaching opportunities, you can shape bias.

When we established the sorority, we had no idea it would grow to be what is today. Our sisterhood is 25 years old, comprised of 13 chapters, across 6 states. What I learned from this group of sisters (chosen family) is

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APAOC 2nd Annual Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month Celebration

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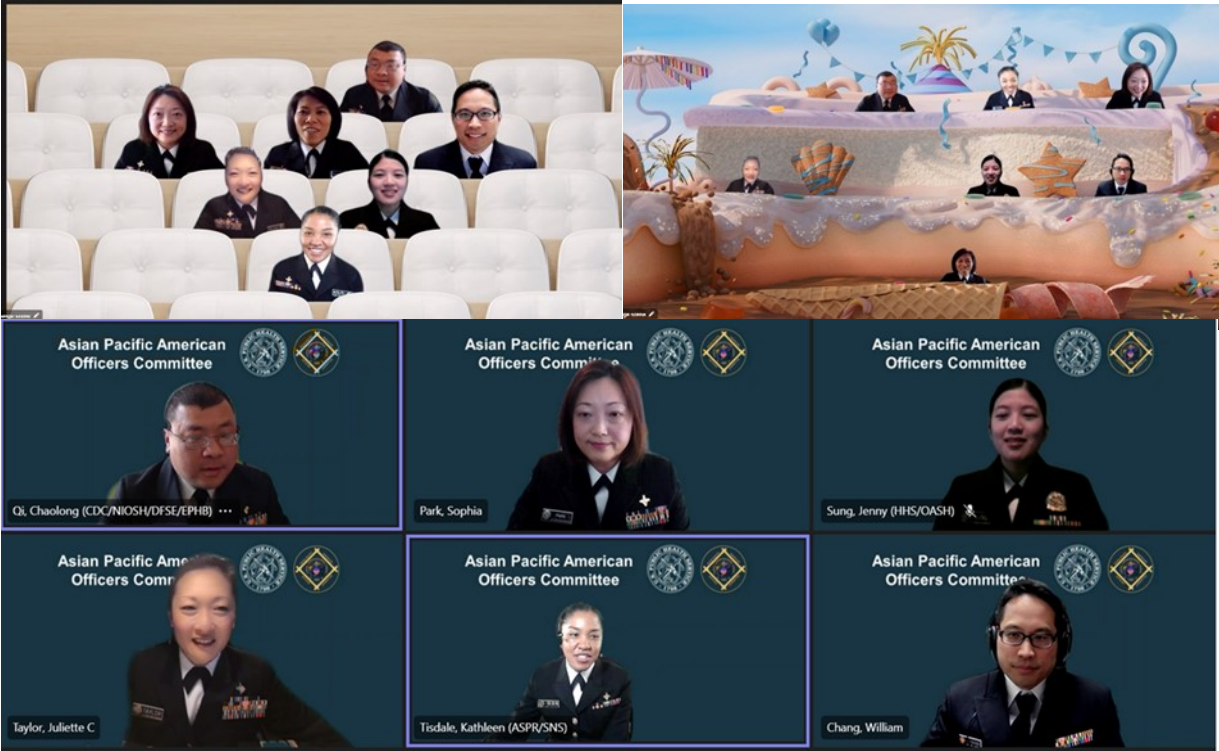
how important and special this community is – we have a natural sense of belonging. We all need a sense of community. The more people we can draw into it, the stronger we are together. We aren't alone in the fight against discrimination, thus it's imperative to unite to advocate for equity.

APAOC: *In your opinion, what is the most valuable aspect of cultural diversity to public health?*

CAPT Taylor: Power of human connection. If you think of public health servants (USPHS for example), we are crucial junctures in the spiderweb of public health. To connect all the dots, cultural diversity is an important element to bridging these gaps.

APAOC: *After learning the experience and journeys of some prominent Asian American women in history, combining with your own experiences, what is one specific advice would you like to offer to others on how to best embrace cultural diversity and identity at the same time?*

CAPT Taylor: It's good to strengthen the natural bonds you have within your community (whatever that may mean to you). Be intentional about building and strengthening bonds that are outside of your community. Remember – you are the key to filling these gaps. Some of the bridges have thankfully been built by our predecessors. Let's build upon their legacies.



Picture of guest speaker, presenters, and planning committee: CAPT Juliette Taylor, CDR Sophia Park, CDR Hai Lien Phung, CDR Chaolong Qi, LCDR William Chang, LCDR Kathleen Tisdale, and LT Jenny Sung.



PACE Outreach at the 2023 Maryland Day

By: CDR Kent Bui and LCDR Jonathan Leshin

On Saturday, April 29, 2023, 26 U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps Officers represented Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE) by participating in the 2023 Maryland Day event at the University of Maryland (UMD). The outreach objectives were to promote the mission of USPHS, demonstrate how to use naloxone in opioid overdose, and encourage healthy eating lifestyle amongst the approximately 80,000 visitors.

Maryland Day is one of UMD's major community outreach events. PACE collaborated with UMD's School of Public Health whose dean is RADM (ret) Boris D. Lushniak (former Acting Surgeon General (July 2013 -December 2014)). RADM (ret) Lushniak visited our booth and thanked us for representing USPHS and shared his valuable wisdom. He reiterated his commitment to public health and encouraged officers to continue USPHS' public health mission to promote, protect, and advance the health and safety of our nation.

The booth was well-attended, with over 950 visitors throughout the day. We offered resources on public health (e.g., flyers, live demonstration) including information on healthy eating, and active living practices. Children who visited the booth to learn more about physical activity seemed especially fond of attempting to out "hula-hoop" officers! We also partnered with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to offer information on opioids and perform demonstrations on appropriate use of naloxone. PACE had an interactive demonstration with a sustainable bike illustrating the process of converting food energy to make electricity by pedaling a bicycle. Many visitors were interested in USPHS and our mission, so officers spent time discussing how USPHS operates including public health deployments and natural disaster responses. Officers directed prospective candidates to appropriate the USPHS recruitment resources subsequently.

This outreach event was a great success as it provided officers opportunities to educate the public about the mission of USPHS, promote opioid overdose awareness and healthy eating lifestyle to the communities. Ultimately, it strengthened the working relationship between PACE, UMD, and DEA, and helped to build a partnership for the future.



RADM (ret) Boris D. Lushniak with PHS officers at the 2023 Maryland Day PACE outreach at University of Maryland



Cultural Ambassador: Bangladesh

By: LCDR Sayyem Akbar

The topic of June's Public Health Service (PHS) Deployment Safety Academy for Field Experience (D-SAFE) Webinar was Nipah Virus. It is a virus mostly prevalent in Bangladesh. Since 2001, outbreaks of Nipah Virus infection have been happening almost every year in Bangladesh. According to U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps' 2018 APAOC Demographic Report, only two out of 255 APAOC Officers identified themselves as Bangladeshi. Therefore, as the sole Cultural Ambassador for Bangladesh participating in the Minority Officers Liaison Council (MOLC) Cultural Ambassador Program, it is timely that I make my fellow Officers aware of certain aspects of the rich Bangladesh culture.

There is a phrase in Bangladesh, "mache vate Bangali", which describes the common diet of Bangladeshi people. It roughly translates to Bengalis are made of fish and rice. Fish is the main element of local cuisine because of the sea and rivers that surround the country. In fact, there are more than 700 rivers that flow through the country which is only as big as the state of Iowa. On the other hand, Bangladeshi's meat consumption is very low. That, combined with the fact that vegetable consumption is high, it is not surprising that Bangladesh is one of the least obese countries.

The history of Bangladesh is deeply tied to its language, Bengali. Even the name Bangladesh itself consists of the words Bangla and desh. Bangla is the native name of the Bengali language, and desh means country. Bangladesh received its independence from Pakistan in 1971. However an incident involving its language occurred in 1952 which is now commemorated as the International Mother Language Day. In 1948, Pakistan declared to change the language of Bangladesh, then East Pakistan, to Urdu. On 21st February of 1952, many civilians, including mostly University students, rallied against the declaration and were open fired upon by the police leading to several students dying and many people being injured. This is a rare historical event where people died for a language. As such, February 21 is currently observed by the United Nations as the International Mother Language Day.

Bangladesh has a rich history of arts and literature. The first Asian Nobel laureate is a Bengali poet named Rabindranath Tagore. Although he was born in present-day India, he spent a significant part of his life in Bangladesh. Rabindranath is the only person to write a national anthem for two different countries, Bangladesh and India. Some other interesting facts about Bangladesh are that it has the longest natural beach and the largest mangrove forest in the world. The beach, known as Cox's Bazar is one of the most famous tourist spots in the country. The mangrove forest of the Sundarbans' inhabitants contains the Royal Bengal Tiger, Bangladesh's national animal.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's estimation from 2018, there are over 213,000 Bangladeshi Americans. Depending on the location of your duty station, you may come across them almost daily such as in New York City or barely ever. However, the number is constantly increasing. As more Bangladeshi Americans adapt to the U.S. lifestyle of living while embracing their heritage and cultural identity, increased cultural sensitivity can only help in increasing acceptance and promoting diversity.



Post-Movie Watch Party Discussion: Everything Everywhere All at Once

By: CDR Nicole Pascua and LT Kun-Yueh (Jayson) Hsieh

On June 11, 2023, the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Cultural Support Workgroup, in partnership with the Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity Advisory Group (SOAGDAG), hosted their first Post-Movie Watch Party Discussion for the movie *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. The two-hour event, moderated by LT Kun-Yueh (Jayson) Hsieh, engaged participants in thoughtful discussion centered on the topics of representation, intersectionality, and shared experiences in the AAPI and LGBTQ+ communities.

Using movie clips and videos from actor interviews, LT Hsieh encouraged participants to explore the movie's significance through the following themes:

Embracing One's True Self: Attendees explored the journey of self-discovery and empowerment portrayed by the character of Evelyn Wang and her adventure across multiple dimensions. Attendees discussed how the film's message resonated with both AAPI and LGBTQ+ communities by sharing their own experiences of embracing their true selves and overcoming personal challenges related to personal identity.

Intersectionality: Participants examined how the movie addressed the overlapping and interconnected aspects of AAPI and LGBTQ+ identities. LT Hsieh drew on examples from the film's diverse characters to examine how Joy, who is both AAPI and LGBTQ+, struggled with reconciling her intersecting identities within her family.

Representation and Visibility: Attendees discussed the significance of AAPI and LGBTQ+ representation in the film by examining whether the movie served as an example of inclusive storytelling, challenged stereotypes, and promoted diverse and inclusive characters.

Cultural Identity and Heritage: Participants explored the themes of cultural identity and heritage and discussed its relevance to both AAPI and LGBTQ+ communities. Attendees were encouraged to share their own experiences of navigating cultural identity.

Empowerment and Resilience: Participants examined the themes of empowerment and resilience portrayed in the film through Evelyn Wang's interdimensional journey to overcome adversity. Attendees explored ways to foster resilience in their personal lives and communities.

Breaking Stereotypes and Challenging Norms: Attendees analyzed how the movie challenged stereotypes and societal norms related to AAPI and LGBTQ+ communities, such as Evelyn Wang's transformation from a seemingly ordinary housewife to a multidimensional hero. Participants discussed how the film defied traditional storytelling norms and the importance of presenting non-stereotypical roles and narratives to promote greater understanding and acceptance of diverse identities.

Mental Health: LT Hsieh discussed the universal themes of depression, isolation, and suicidal ideation as experienced by the movie's characters (and within AAPI and LGBTQ+ communities) and the importance of authentic connection, belonging, and sense of purpose to counteract these feelings.

Attendees represented the Health Services Professional Advisory Committee (HSPAC), Engineer Professional Advisory Category (EPAC), Pharmacy Professional Advisory Category (PharmPAC), and Scientist Professional Advisory Category (SciPAC). All attendees reported being very satisfied with the event and indicated that they would recommend future watch-party events to fellow officers.

Special thanks to LCDR Sharon Edelson-Mammel, LCDR Madalene Mandap, LT Beth Rubenstein as well as the other planning committee members from SOAGDAG who provided feedback and ideas that made this event a success. Additionally, thank you to APAOC leadership—CDRs Chaolong Qi and Sophia Park, for their support of this joint event.

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Post-Movie Watch Party Discussion: Everything Everywhere All at Once

Continued

APAOC and the AAPI Cultural Support Workgroup anticipate collaborating on future initiatives with SOAG-DAG that support a more inclusive and diverse culture within the USPHS community. To volunteer for the AAPI Cultural Support Workgroup please contact CDR Nicole Pascua at: Nicole.Pascua@samhsa.hhs.gov or LT Jayson Hsieh at Kun-Yueh.Hsieh@va.gov.



Top row, L to R: CDR Chaolong Qi, LCDR Sharon Edelson-Mammel, LT Jayson Hsieh, CDR Nicole Pascua, CDR Luz Rivera, LCDR Madalene Mandap, and LCDR William Chang.



APAOC members find antidote to loneliness at the USPHS Symposium

By: LTs Amie Park and Jing Tassone

While the “new normal” of hybrid and remote work brought about due to the COVID-19 pandemic has numerous benefits, including improved work-life balance, productivity, and overall flexibility, a drawback is the diminished opportunity to connect with colleagues and fellow officers. This has likely been especially challenging for new officers who commissioned during the pandemic and attended Officer Basic Course (OBC) virtually. Furthermore, limited or even nonexistent interactions with other officers at their respective duty station may lead new officers to feel (professionally) isolated.

Loneliness has become an increasingly prevalent issue in modern society, affecting people of all ages, backgrounds, and walks of life. Recognizing the gravity of this problem, the Surgeon General of the United States sounded the alarm on the loneliness epidemic¹, shedding light on its far-reaching consequences on individual health and well-being. While loneliness can be a deeply personal struggle, there is a glimmer of hope in the form of social gatherings. Events ranging from small get-togethers to large community celebrations can play a vital role in fostering meaningful connections, reducing social isolation, and promoting overall well-being. These gatherings serve as a potent antidote to the pervasive loneliness that plagues our society.

The USPHS Symposium held in Tulsa, Oklahoma during May of this year allowed new officers to meet individuals from their OBC class in person for the very first time and foster esprit de corps. Additionally, the Asian Pacific American Officers Committee (APAOC) embraced the innate human need to engage in social activities and meaningful conversations by organizing a social meetup at the Symposium to cultivate a sense of belonging in a smaller community within the Corps. The joy, laughter, and sense of camaraderie experienced during the APAOC social was nothing short of transformative in helping to alleviate feelings of loneliness and foster a resilient network of social support through shared experiences and a collective sense of purpose.



APAOC social at the 2023 USPHS Symposium, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Photo: LT Jing Tassone

¹ Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community. (2023). U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>



Call for Article Submissions and Volunteers

The Publications Subcommittee is seeking article submissions for the 2023 APAOC Newsletters. Please consider submitting articles highlighting any newsworthy activities of APAOC members, whether you are a general member or a voting member.

Interested in submitting an article or volunteering?

Please forward your submissions to

LCDR Adena Yau, Adena.Yau@fda.hhs.gov

LCDR Jun Lee, Jun.Lee@fda.hhs.gov

General Guidelines

- Please submit articles in Microsoft Word (.DOC or .DOCX format), using Garamond 12-point font.
- An editor will be assigned to each article and they will work with the authors to edit/modify the content as necessary.
- When emailing your article, please include the following subject line: **APAOC Fall/Winter 2023 Newsletter – [Article Title][Author Last Name](s)**

Agency Clearance (if required for your article)

- Please obtain appropriate clearances for any agency-specific or agency-sensitive information prior to submission to APAOC.
- Before sending the article to your agency, we encourage the primary author to contact the Publications Subcommittee via email once you have your preliminary draft for an initial review.

Photography Guidelines

- Photographs are strongly encouraged to be submitted with articles. Please ensure that the submitted pictures meet the following guidelines:
- Photographs in .JPG or .PNG format are preferred. High quality resolution is strongly recommended. Please embed photo(s) into the Word document and include original file(s) as an attachment for better resolution.
- Uniformed officers must follow the USPHS uniform specifications and related policy uniform (e.g., conference name tags should not be visible over the uniform).
- Uniformed officers must follow general military etiquette when including different ranks (e.g., officers should be ordered in lowest to highest rank, left to right).
- A caption is required for each picture; in the caption, please include the rank and full name for each PHS officer present in the picture.
- If there is a civilian in the photo, please obtain their written authorization to publish the photo.

