



Commissioned Corps of the US Public Health Service  
**Scientist Professional Advisory Committee**

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# **Scientist Category Handbook: Commissioned Officers Association**

**Last Updated: September 2022**

# Commissioned Officers Association (COA)

## **Mission & Overview**

The Commissioned Officers Association (COA) is a nationally recognized member-based organization that was formed to “protect and enhance the public health and safety of the United States by supporting and advancing the interests of the USPHS Commissioned Corps and its officers.”

The COA is the only organization working exclusively on behalf of active, inactive, and retired Public Health Service (PHS) officers. With more than 80 active local branches, COA plays a vital role in addressing the needs of its members both within the U.S. and globally. COA serves as a legislative aid, a media consultant, and a career development specialist to its members by providing:

- Representation and advocacy
- Education and training for health professionals
- Collaboration with related organizations
- Dissemination of public and professional information

Recent achievements in legislative advocacy include the transferability of the Post 9/11 GI Bill to dependents of PHS officers; expanded health coverage for officers' children with autism; granting federal whistleblower protections to officers; and the extension of morale, welfare, and recreation benefits to officers and their families. Other accomplishments COA has made through advocacy include the Senate passage of amendments that fixed the Survivor Benefit Plan and provide for concurrent receipt of military retiree pay and VA disability compensation. The COA's sister nonprofit agency, Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF; [www.phscof.org](http://www.phscof.org)) also provides educational opportunities such as the annual USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium.

*Visit their website ([www.coausphs.org](http://www.coausphs.org)) for more information about National and local branch membership .*

## **Membership**

COA membership consists of active regular, active reserve, reserve, retired, and former PHS officers.

Feel free to contact the current Scientist Representative on the COA Board of Directors to get involved or learn more: <https://coausphs.org/page/Board>.

## **COA's Efforts to Support PHS Officers**

### *Capitol Hill Representation*

COA legislation on Capitol Hill continually supports all PHS officers - active duty, reserve, and retired.

### *Local Representation*

COA branches generate new venues for meeting other PHS officers within your local area, while providing a forum for the discussion of concerns within the USPHS Commissioned Corps, as well as provide community service opportunities to officers.

### *Annual USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium*

With a mixture of presentations and networking opportunities, COF's annual meeting invites colleagues from around the country to gather to discuss new scientific presentations while stimulating open forums about public health-related issues. The meeting also provides opportunities for completing continuing education and basic readiness requirements. For more information, please see:

<https://www.phscof.org/symposium.html> .

### *Leadership Opportunities*

PHS officers who are members of COA have an opportunity to represent their categories on either local COA branches or the national board of COA as a director or as a member of various committees to assist in advancing the mission of the USPHS Commissioned Corps and ensuring the viability of the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

### *Communications*

*Frontline* is the COA newsletter which provides reports on monthly activities and items of interest to its members about the USPHS Commissioned Corps, the Association, and COF. To read the latest newsletter, please see:

<http://coausphs.org/page/Frontline/>.

### *Scholarship Programs*

COF offer thousands of dollars in college scholarships for children, grandchildren, and spouses of COA members. COF also sponsors a fellowship program funding junior officers who want to pursue a global health certificate at the University of Maryland.

COF also offers a Junior Officer/Civil Servant Scholarship. The Junior Officer Scholarship is available for officers at a rank of O-3 (LT) or below. The scholarship covers the registration cost of the Annual USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium.

### *Discounted Public Health Education Programs*

COA members can receive a 50% tuition discount for the online Master of Public Health and Public Health Certificate programs at New York Medical College.

COA members who are enrolled in online Master of Public Health or Executive Master of Health Administration programs with the Milken Institute School of Public Health at

George Washington University can receive scholarships (subject to availability). COA members qualify for scholarships to the following online programs: Master of Science in Health Informatics at George Washington University, Master of Business Administration (MBA) at the University of North Carolina, MBA and Healthcare MBA at Simmons University, and Master of Arts in International Relations and MBA at American University. For more information, please see: <http://coausphs.org/page/Benefits/>.

COA members also have access to a free exam study guide for the Certified in Public Health (CPH) exam (see <https://cphstudyguide.aspph.org/>; discount code: [coadiscount](#)). For more information regarding the CPH, please visit the following: <https://www.nbphe.org/>.

### *Insurance Programs*

COA enables members to participate in several low-cost insurance programs, including Term Life, Disability Income, Long-Term Disability (LTD), Hospital Income Protection, Accidental Death & Dismemberment (AD&D), Auto and Home, LifeLock ID Protection, and Pet Health Insurance. With the exception of the LTD plan, participation in these programs may continue after an officer separates or retires from PHS as long as membership in COA remains current. Information about the COA Group Insurance Programs can be found on the following website: [www.coainsurance.com](http://www.coainsurance.com).

### *The Walt Disney Company*

Due to COA's efforts, PHS officers are now eligible to purchase Disney Military Promotional Tickets and are eligible for discounts at resort hotels. See the following link for more information: <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/special-offers/>

### *DD214*

Since 2016, COA advocated for PHS officers to be issued a DD Form 214 (DD214) instead of a PHS1867 at the time of separation or retirement. In August 2021, USPHS Commissioned Corps Headquarters announced that PHS officers who separated or retired on or after October 1, 2021, would be issued a DD214 instead of the PHS1867. COA continues to seek this benefit for officers who have previously retired or separated.

### *Expiring Leave for PHS Officers*

In fiscal year 2021, many PHS officers were faced with losing a significant amount of earned leave due to the high volume of deployments preventing them from being able to use it. Unlike the other uniformed services, the leave could not be carried over to the subsequent fiscal year by a simple memorandum because USPHS Commissioned Corps leave policy is written into law. COA advocated on Capitol Hill on behalf of PHS officers, which resulted in language authorizing carryover of leave being inserted into the FY2021 Continuing Resolution (H.R. 8337). This bill passed on September 30, 2020, becoming Public Law 116-159.

*COA is working hard to obtain other benefits for its members, which include:*

Uniform Service Organization (USO) Access at Airports: In response to a letter to the USO President, the USO agreed to examine their policies to determine whether PHS officers are eligible to use their airport lounges.

Military Pass from the National Park Service: A letter to the Director of the National Park Service was written, in which COA may weigh in on the reauthorization of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.

Access to MWR Resources: A letter was written to the Army's Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation requesting that PHS officers receive authorized access to all MWR programs per Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 1015.10.