



UNITED STATES  
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE  
COMMISSIONED CORPS

2020-2022

PANDEMIC RESPONSE IN REVIEW

Readiness & Deployment Branch



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*"Thank you to our brave Public Health Service officers for your courage and dedication to support the numerous deployment missions. Many of you faced challenging deployments from mitigating the spread of infectious diseases, supporting our country with the border and immigration response, responding to natural disasters, to assisting in special security events. Your resiliency does not go unrecognized."*

*As America's Health Responders, you successfully upheld the USPHS mission to promote, protect and advance the health and safety of this nation."*

**REAR ADMIRAL RICK SCHOBITZ**  
*Director of USPHS Commissioned Corps Headquarters*



# ALWAYS READY TO PROTECT, PROMOTE, AND ADVANCE THE NATION'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

Always ready to meet critical public health needs - throughout the nation and across the globe. This is the ongoing work of the Readiness and Deployment Branch (RDB) of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Public Health Service officers have again proven their dedication to the promotion, protection, and advancement of the nation's health.



**U.S. Public Health Service officers on deployment in remote Alaska.**

From 2020-2022, Public Health Service officers have embraced the challenge of COVID-19 response, amid the concurring additional public health needs throughout the nation. From serving in remote parts of Alaska only accessible by boat, to training new officers with real-world simulations, to operating in freezing conditions on tribal reservations with temperatures dipping 20 below zero, Public Health Service officers suited up and pushed through obstacles to best serve agencies and communities in need. This inaugural summary of activities will set the stage for future year-in-reviews to come, reflecting on RDB activity highlights, missions, and accomplishments.

## **Responding to Global Health Needs**

Operating in every corner of the country and around the world, Public Health Service officers work daily to protect, promote, and advance national and global health.

From CYs 2020-2022, nearly 50% of the USPHS Commissioned Corps supported 15 federal agencies by responding to 952 missions and 6,276 deployments led by the USPHS Commissioned Corps. This represents a total of 182,862 cumulative deployment days across four lines of effort: infectious disease, border and immigration, natural disaster, and event support and response.

## **1. INFECTIOUS DISEASE RESPONSE**

The two-member Guam Public Health Laboratory (GPHL) staff struggled testing 900 nasal pharyngeal swab samples per day. At this time, in early February 2022, Guam reported 305 COVID-19-related deaths and 32,735 COVID-19 cases. As one of only a few subject matter experts Corps-wide who upholds a high level of proficiency and understanding of microbiology and Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) analysis, RDB identified CDR Ericka Murray, a microbiologist from Dallas, TX, who deployed to Guam for 32 days.

CDR Murray independently conducted Ribonucleic acid RNA extractions and PCR tests on 300 nasal pharyngeal swabs per day, significantly increasing sample processing, analysis, and results turn-around time by 30%. She not only increased operational efficiency but also improved effectiveness with easy-to-understand Standard Operating Procedures guidelines for current and future GPHL technicians.

CDR Murray's support of an infectious disease response in Guam is one of many USPHS Commissioned Corps success stories. In 2022, 60% of our response efforts were for infectious diseases. Serving on the front lines of infectious disease responses requires strategic, comprehensive, and sustainable efforts to protect our nation, as well as rapid deployment.

Public Health Service officers were called upon to support communities tackling the robust and ongoing COVID-19 response that began in 2020, with 2,233 distinct officers serving 694 missions for a cumulative 127,981 deployment days. During 2022 alone, there were 572 deployments for 130 missions completed by 572 distinct officers.

Additionally in 2022, Public Health Service officers deployed to support Mpox Response (13 distinct officers, 2 missions, 221 cumulative deployment days); Monoclonal Antibody Operations in the American Samoa (13 officers, 2 missions, 221 cumulative deployment days); and Indian Health Service Tuberculosis Response (4 distinct officers, 1 mission, 83 cumulative deployment days).

CAPT Mark Iseri of the Yakama Service Unit of the Indian Health Service said his unit lost two pharmacy officers due to attrition in October 2022 and credited USPHS with filling in a critical gap when Public Health Service officers deployed to Yakama in Toppenish, WA for 391 cumulative deployment days. They, along with Yakama’s team of pharmacists, administered 7,097 vaccinations and 172 COVID-19 Therapeutics.



Guam residents attend a memorial service.

*“The Territory of Guam is extremely rich in Chamorro customs, culture, cuisine, and history. I took every opportunity to learn and fostered relationships with the kindest people on this tiny island. I left this deployment feeling enriched, confident in my laboratory skills, and invigorated to continue to serve.”* - CDR ERICKA MURRAY, HSO



Guam dancers at the Grand opening of Soka Gakki International.

*“It is without a doubt that contributions from our deployed Commissioned Corps Officers enabled us to maintain the important undertaking of controlling the spread of the disease and minimizing its effect on the community of the Yakama Nation Reservation.”*

- CAPT MARK ISERI, Yakama Service Unit, Indian Health Service

## 2. BORDER HEALTH RESPONSE

In 2021-2022 the USPHS-led border health protection responses which included 2,780 cumulative deployment days served by 85 distinct officers, on 86 deployments spanning across 44 missions.

The most robust and longstanding border health support during this time by USPHS was Operation Allies Welcome (OAW), which USPHS supported from 2021-2022. To date, the Department of Homeland Security reports that approximately 88,500 Afghan nationals have arrived in the U.S. as part of OAW, an effort coordinated across the federal government to support and resettle vulnerable Afghans.



From deployments in Fort Dix, NJ and Fort Bliss, NM, to the largest safe haven center in Leesburg, VA housing 4,500 Afghan nationals, 440 Public Health Service officers worked with 18 federal agencies to provide onsite crisis and behavioral health services, infection control, case management and medical operations.



Afghan evacuee children await assistance via Operation Allies Welcome.

To ensure continuity of services for 1,500 Afghan guests, Public Health Service officers developed a telehealth program for providing all behavioral health and psychiatry services during a COVID-19 surge - a program addition that continued to be useful through the duration of the mission. USPHS also managed donation operations and ensured 51 discharged families had car seats, luggage, strollers, and other available donated items upon departure, while also obtaining approval for the purchase of 95 additional car seats to ensure availability for those in need.

LCDR Nicholas Buhr was deployed twice for OAW. As an HHS Behavioral Health Federal Coordinator, he designed behavioral health management systems as the mission expanded from a tent city population of 9,000 to 15,000 Afghan evacuees, including educating them on American cultural norms. He created emergency management systems to manage serious mental illness, suicidality, and psychosis.

During his second deployment as Officer in Charge (OIC), LCDR Buhr organized initial welcome, screening, testing, and quarantine (as needed) of three inbound flights of more than 800 passengers, improving previous intake processing time by 60%. He led this team to successfully prevent spread of COVID-19, flu, and tuberculosis through isolation and quarantine programs, for a total population of 1,600 Afghan evacuees with zero outbreaks.

*"In both missions, the idea of building trust was hugely important. Trust ends up taking on so many forms on a mission: that what is said will get done, that problems will be reported up, that information is accurate, that ideas are considered," LCDR Buhr said. "Only when the trust grows can the team find a strong working rhythm."*

- LCDR NICHOLAS NUHR, SCIENTIST

LCDR Heather Light served as an OIC during a month-long OAW deployment in Fort Bliss, NM, providing high quality behavioral health services to 610 Afghanistan citizens fleeing humanitarian crisis. Her team initiated and led cultural psychosocial education support groups to increase life skills, stress management, and coping skills for adapting to life in the U.S.



Afghanistan evacuees board a flight.

*"Being deployed to Operation Allies Welcome was my first OIC leadership opportunity. It was a remarkable deployment, and the behavioral services provided filled a service provision gap that made a substantial impact on the Afghan refugee families and our partners, the U.S. Army and contractors."* - LCDR HEATHER LIGHT, HSO

### 3. NATURAL DISASTER RESPONSE

The skills, training, and preparedness of Public Health Service officers is a match for deployment after a natural disaster. The USPHS Commissioned Corps excels in responding to any type of natural disaster, including three hurricanes and one tornado in 2022 alone, with additional five responses managed between 2020-2021. Across FY2022, environmental health officers provided services after Hurricane Fiona in Puerto Rico, Hurricane Ian in Florida, and Hurricane Irma in Louisiana. During the largest natural disaster deployment, 20 Public Health Service officers - including engineers, scientists, public health, and environmental health officers - responded for 160 days to tornadic disasters in Kentucky and Tennessee.

After Hurricanes Ian and Nichole devastated the Orlando, FL area, USPHS scientists worked with local, state, and federal partners to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment for the impacted counties of Florida, assessing data for 26 counties and nearly 11 million Florida residents who were impacted by these natural disasters.



Houses along the shoreline are destroyed by Hurricane Ian in Florida.

CDR Damon Smith was among 21 Public Health Service officers deployed with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response (OHSEPR) for the 2021 Central U.S. Tornadoes Disaster Human



U.S. Public Health Service officers review medical records.

Services Impact Assessment Mission. Public Health Service officers served on the Incident Management Team as strike team members and safety officers, supporting the Emergency Response Team in the planning, information management, and resource coordination sections. During this mission, 167 assessments of ACF-funded human services providers in Arkansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee were conducted to document structural damage, operational impacts, and access to services.



A Public Health Service officer performs a patient's surgical procedure with the assistance of another uniformed service member.

### 4. EVENT SUPPORT AND RESPONSE

While event response accounted for less than 1% of total response efforts in 2022, the support of Public Health Service officers is critical to ensuring event safety and success. Officers provided support for national special security events on Independence Day, Memorial Day, and Peace Officers' Memorial Day, as well as response for missions including the IHS Emergency Medical Operations Response.



CAPT Anthony Johnson of Maryland deployed for a month to Fort Peck Reservation in Poplar, Montana, serving as OIC and Behavioral Health Officer for the IHS mission. Peck Reservation spans 3,200 square miles and is home to two separate Indian nations with an estimated 10,000 enrolled tribal members, and roughly 6,000 members who live on or near the reservation. Located in the northeastern corner of Montana along the Missouri River, bordering North Dakota and Canada, the Fort Peck Tribal community has been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with low staffing levels and pressing healthcare needs, exacerbated by challenges and limited resources.



**Regional Public Health Service Officers maintain relationships with Federal and State, Local, Tribal and Territorial (SLTT) partners to enhance public health and medical preparedness and response capabilities.**



**Public Health Service officers supported the interservice Arctic Care mission.**

Public Health Service officers weathered ice, snow, and temperatures as extreme as 20 below to provide direct ambulatory, preventative care, and case management services to children, adults, and families to enhance and aid in life sustainment.

***“The PHS team is commended for its dedication and service which advanced the Indian Health Service mission to raise the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level.”***

**- CAPT ANTHONY JOHNSON, HSO**

## **ONGOING FRONTLINE RESPONSE AMID THE PANDEMIC**

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the nation and the world on a grand scale - from testing to treatment to quarantine policies and so much more. In spite of facing professional and personal challenges during this global crisis, Public Health Service officers stood ready to answer the call. Officer Basic Training was moved to virtual sessions, along with other key stakeholder meetings. But the critical work of promoting, protecting, and advancing the health of the nation continued - both online, at various federal agencies, and with boots on the ground. While USPHS response began in 2020, it continued throughout 2022.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses and pharmacists displayed immense rural

dedication across multiple regions, and their selfless service was pivotal in safe-guarding the well-being of affected communities. These professionals played critical roles in various aspects of the response, including:

- **Community-based testing**
- **Widespread vaccination administration**
- **Management of higher workload during hospital patient surges**
- **Long-term care facility evaluation and oversight of vulnerable populations**
- **Staff depletion response**

Their contributions aligned with civilian response, emphasizing the true value and sacrifice of these professionals.

*“Facing powerful impacts of COVID-19, we relied on each other, as ‘battle buddies,’ ensuring proper PPE wear and supporting one another physically and emotionally. The dedication and resilience were evident even before the nationwide recognition of healthcare heroes. The ‘thank you, health care heroes’ and ‘heroes work here’ signs that popped up across the nation later in the pandemic mirrored my sentiments about each officer that donned their N-95 and scrubs in underserved communities, caring for patients isolated from families while battling COVID-19. I am proud to serve with public health heroes in uniform.”*

- CDR KAMI COOPER, NURSE



Strike team nurses ensured continuity of care in challenging times across the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the frontline support to this pandemic across the nation and abroad, USPHS continued to respond to public health urgent and emergent needs, true to its history. Here are some of the various USPHS Commissioned Corps missions that were successfully completed throughout the pandemic years:

## MISSION

YEAR	Infectious Disease	Border Health Protection	Natural Disaster Response	National Special Security Event	Clinical	Internal
2020	COVID-19 Response		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hurricane</li> <li>Tropical Storm Douglas</li> <li>Wildfire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Justice Ginsburg’s Funeral</li> <li>Congressman John Lewis’ Funeral</li> <li>4th of July</li> <li>Friends of Ireland</li> </ul>	FT Belknap	
2021	COVID-19 Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CBP &amp; OAW Response</li> <li>Unaccompanied Children</li> </ul>	Hurricane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peace Officer Memorial</li> <li>Presidential Inauguration</li> <li>4th of July</li> </ul>	DOD Med Support	CCHQ MAB Readiness Operations
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ebola</li> <li>COVID-19 Response</li> <li>IHS Tuberculosis Outbreak</li> <li>Monkey Pox</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OAW ACF ORR Response</li> <li>UC ORR Clinical</li> <li>Unaccompanied Children</li> <li>ACF Resettlement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hurricanes Fiona &amp; Ian Response and Recovery</li> <li>Tornado</li> <li>Puerto Rico Earthquake</li> </ul>	4th of July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NPS Clinical Support</li> <li>IHS State of Emergency</li> </ul>	

ACF = Administration for Children and Families

CBP = Customs and Border Control

DOD = Department of Defense

IHS = Indian Health Service

NPS = National Park Service

OAW = Operation Allies Welcome

ORR = Office of Refugee Resettlement

UC = Unaccompanied Minors



# EQUIPPING THE FUTURE, PREPARED TO SERVE



A Public Health Service officer is assisted by a sister-service member as he performs a patient's dental exam.

USPHS works to ensure that new officers are prepared to serve their local communities as well as communities abroad. Newly commissioned officers have the opportunity to undergo rigorous, real-world-scenario training to best prepare them to be on the front lines of public health emergencies and natural disasters. Our Preparedness and Exercises are made available to all officers and in 2022, offerings included:

## Online and in-person continuing education and conferences

**Operation Bushmaster:** 17 Officers served as Faculty Advisors for a Capstone event for senior students in the Uniformed Services University School of Medicine and Graduate School of Nursing. Students engaged in a simulated austere combat environment requiring medical support across a range of military operations. This intense five-day medical field practicum provided students with an opportunity to apply their medical and leadership abilities in a field setting with a real-world-feel experience. This is where students put their skills to the test.

**Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) Events:** We deployed 64 officers across 18 sites to support five missions. Nearly 9,000 patients were seen, and 36,785 procedures completed with a fair market value over more than \$3.5 billion.



Two uniformed service members collaborate to discuss a patient's care.



A Public Health Service pharmacist speaks with a patient about medication.



A Public Health Service officer teams with a military service member to conduct a medical intake.

PHERST officer LCDR Jamillah Bynum said that serving with the Valley Healthcare IRT was a life-altering experience. As one of the Licensed Clinical Social Workers and OIC, LCDR Bynum led and assisted her team with providing no-cost behavioral health and community referrals at three sites. While attending IRT, she received hands-on, real world trainings addressing topics such as disaster preparedness and management and telehealth, which she otherwise wouldn't have been able to access. "Having the opportunity to engage with service members from sister services was insightful. It enabled me to enhance networking and forge long lasting friendships. Most importantly, I was able to provide free behavioral health services to underserved Americans in need."



Sister-service members conduct a simulated operation on a manikin at an Innovative Readiness Training event.



A sister-service member has a simulated chest wound for training purposes at an Innovative Readiness Training event.

***"The community impact was enormous: thousands of patients get care, and millions of dollars are saved in providing no-cost healthcare to folks in rural areas in desperate need of healthcare."***

**- CDR ALEXANDER VARGA, PHARMACY**

A Public Health Service officer performs a therapeutic procedure for a patient during an Innovative Readiness Training event.



As a PHERST officer, LT Christine Nappa served as co-lead of a team of five behavioral health assets covering four IRT sites that provided medical, optometry, dental, and behavioral health services to the residents of Kauai, Hawaii, and served as the lead behavioral health asset at Kapa Middle School's site, providing direct one-on-one behavioral health services and trainings to patients and service members. The IRT in Kauai allowed officers to "forge relationships with leadership and other disciplines to create a smooth process for patient flow," LT Nappa said. After Action Report feedback resulted in a correction of code fees, increasing the estimated fair market value of total behavioral health services for IRT Tropic Care from \$5,400 to \$26,000.



***"As a result of the skill, professionalism, and expertise consistently displayed by Public Health Service Officers, over the course of 2022, the U.S. Public Health Service was requested by name to engage in missions across the country at a higher rate than ever before. Thanks to our dedicated and highly trained officers, we continue to be able to meet the needs of our Nation and continue to stand ready to answer our Nation's call."***

**REAR ADMIRAL DENISE HINTON**  
Deputy Surgeon General



# RIISING TO MEET THE NATION’S 2023 PUBLIC HEALTH NEEDS

In summary, the USPHS has had an indelible impact on the health of the nation since its inception. Throughout the pandemic period, this response is demonstrated by a strong and resilient group of Public Health Service officers, deployed by RDB to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of the nation with skill, expertise, dedication, and professionalism.

To spread the capabilities of our service, there were increased training and preparedness opportunities for Public Health Service officers, relations with internal stakeholders were further developed, and collaborative engagement with external stakeholders were exercised to spread the capabilities of our service. Training, preparedness exercises, and deployment roles are based on capability needs and deployment trends, and are continuously assessed to meet the needs of officers and the nation.

From working to stop the spread of infectious diseases at our borders to supporting children in need to training the newest members of our service to be on the frontlines of public health—the USPHS is committed now and in the



A group of Public Health Service officers stands in front of Madigan Army Medical Center.

years ahead to be “In Officio Salutis” as we meet new and conquerable public health needs. Thanks to each Public Health Service officer- you remain a valuable force and continue to stand ready to answer our nation’s call.

If you know of qualified and motivated public health professionals interested in becoming a part of “America’s Health Responders,” direct them to learn more at [www.usphs.gov](http://www.usphs.gov).

## USPHS Cooperative Agencies

*The USPHS works with more than a dozen federal agencies and partners to promote, protect, and advance the health and safety of this nation.*



ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES



ASPR



CDC

NIH

CMS