

Georgia Volunteer Health Care Program (aka Health Share Volunteers in Medicine Act)

In 2005, the General Assembly passed House Bill 166, the “Health Share” Volunteers in Medicine Act, which created the Georgia Volunteer Health Care Program. This law authorizes the State of Georgia via the Department of Community Health (DCH) to offer state-sponsored Sovereign Immunity (SI) protection to uncompensated, licensed health care professionals who provide donated care to eligible patients. The state will be responsible for litigation as long as the volunteer health care professional acts within the scope of services. There is limited control of the program to ensure state liability protection to providers.

Three Acts (O.C.G.A. § 43-1-28, O.C.G.A. § 43-11-52, and O.C.G.A. § 43-34-45.1) were also created to allow certain health care professionals who are retired or licensed in another state the ability to obtain the appropriate license to volunteer in free clinics. A 2009 Georgia Assembly amendment allows all compensated licensed practical nurses, registered professional nurses, certified nurse midwives, and advanced practical nurses working in a free clinic to also receive SI protection.

All licensed volunteer health care professionals will be considered a “State Officer or Employee” and therefore eligible for SI protection once they have entered into agreement with the DCH. Providers are credentialed, and applications and agreements are sent to interested professionals. The completed packets are screened upon return. Should a provider be on probation, suspension, or have sanctions from Medicare or Medicaid, then he or she will not be eligible for SI protection. License checks are conducted on a yearly basis. A licensed health care professional may volunteer in a free clinic and/or his or her own private office as long as the required paperwork for the patient is completed by a designated Financial Eligibility Specialist DCH volunteer. These volunteers (support staff), who are also screened, may serve in the free medical and/or dental practice/office and may or may not be compensated.

An eligible patient is defined as:

- A person who is Medicaid eligible under Georgia law, or
- A person who is without health or dental coverage and
- A person whose income is at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), or
- A client of the DCH or Department of Human Resources who meets income criteria and income is at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Limit.
- A person who is not charged for care given by covered providers.

The GVHCP is administered by a statewide director, support staff, and six Regional Volunteer Coordinators who are located in Gainesville, Savannah, Macon, Atlanta, Augusta, and Albany. The departmental forms, agreement, policies and procedures manual, and the rules have been approved by the DCH's Division of Legal Services. Services provided by the program include:

- Assistance with setting up volunteer medical/dental clinics and working with existing clinics.
- Credentialing and contracting with licensed health care professionals.
- Processing applications, training and supervision of DCH Financial Eligibility Specialist volunteers.
- Conducting quality assurance reviews on the financial eligibility and referral forms.

Interested volunteers may contact the program at 1-866-319-0816; GAVolunteers@dch.ga.gov; or by logging on to <http://dch.georgia.gov/gvhcp>. The Regional Volunteer Coordinator in your area will conduct initial and annual credentialing, and contract with individual providers and clinics.