

# GEORGIA VOLUNTEER HEALTH CARE PROGRAM

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Q. What is the Georgia Volunteer Health Care Program?

A. The Georgia Volunteer Health Care Program (GVHCP) was established in 2005 with the passage of House Bill 166, the “Health Share Volunteers in Medicine Act.” This program provides an avenue for licensed health care professionals to provide donated medical/dental care to the uninsured and low-income residents of Georgia while under the protection of Sovereign Immunity (SI). The program strives to increase access to health care for medically indigent residents through volunteerism. A 2009 Georgia Assembly amendment allows compensated licensed practical nurses, registered professional nurses, nurse midwives and advanced practice nurses who work in a free clinic to also receive SI protection. A 2010 amendment to the law was made to extend sovereign immunity to compensated physician assistants.



### Q. What is Sovereign Immunity?

A. The State of Georgia is solely liable for any injury or damage suffered by a patient receiving health care under the provider’s Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) Agreement, as long as the provider works within the scope of his/her professional license.

### Q. Why do we have Sovereign Immunity?

A. The Legislature found that numerous residents of this state who are uninsured, low-income or Medicaid eligible are unable to access health care because providers fear an increased risk of medical malpractice liability. It is the intent of the Legislature that access to medical/dental care for uninsured residents be improved by providing governmental protection to health care providers who offer donated quality health care services to underserved populations. Therefore, health care professionals who contract to provide such services as state employees are provided SI protection.

### Q. Whom does Sovereign Immunity cover?

A. Licensed health care providers who contract as “state employees” are provided SI protection as well as the lay volunteers who complete the department’s paperwork. Providers and lay volunteers who donate their time and skills to the GVHCP are afforded the same legal protection that state employees receive.

### Q. What are the patient eligibility requirements?

A. Patients seeking treatment must be at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and have no health or dental coverage for services being sought; or must be Medicaid eligible under Georgia law, or be a client of DCH or the Georgia Department of Human Resources whose income is at or below 200 percent of the FPL.

### Q. What types of treatment/services are provided?

A. The health care resources available depend on participating providers; therefore, services may vary throughout organizations.

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**Q. Does the Georgia Volunteer Health Care Program provide prescriptions and/or laboratory services?**

**A.** No. Prescriptions and laboratory services are not a mandated function of the program. Some clinics and programs may assist patients with these costs.

**Q. Can retired or out-of-state health care providers volunteer?**

**A.** Yes. Legislation was enacted to allow certain health care professionals who are retired or licensed in another state the opportunity to obtain a special license in order to volunteer in one of the free clinics. The health care provider needs to contact the appropriate licensing board for instructions and an application.

**Q. Where do licensed health and dental care professionals volunteer their time to treat eligible patients?**

**A.** Contracted volunteers have several options. They may volunteer in established partnering GVHCP clinics, or start a free clinic where they'd set their own hours. Volunteers may also opt to provide volunteer services in the comfort of their own private offices/practices.

**Q. Can I receive Continuing Education hours by volunteering?**

**A.** Yes. The Composite Board of Medical Examiners and the Georgia Board of Dentistry are offering 1 hour of Continuing Education credit per four volunteer hours, with a maximum of 10 C.E. per 2-year cycle. One must submit to the Composite State Board of Medical Examiners or the Georgia Board of Dentistry at the time of license renewal.

**Q. How do I volunteer with the Georgia Volunteer Health Care Program?**

**A.** You may contact the program at **866-319-0816**, **GAVolunteers@dch.ga.gov**, or by logging on to **dch.georgia.gov/gvhcp**. The Regional Volunteer Coordinator in your area will conduct initial and annual credentialing, and contract with individual providers and clinics.