



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The information below may be of help to you as consider volunteering your time to improve access to rheumatology care. If you have a question that is not addressed below, please email us at [VERA@rheumatology.org](mailto:VERA@rheumatology.org).

### **Can I volunteer if I'm a fellow, nurse or other non-physician healthcare provider?**

Yes, in many settings, trainees (with appropriate supervision), nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, physical therapists and others can provide care. Even if the site you're interested in does not currently have non-physician volunteers, ask about this option - you could be the first!

### **Can I volunteer if I am retired?**

Yes, as long as your professional license is current. See more about professional licenses below.

### **What is the best way for me to find out about volunteer opportunities in my area?**

There are two excellent organizations that help prospective volunteers find free care clinics in specific regions.

- **[National Association of Free & Charitable Clinics](#)**

The National Association of Free & Charitable Clinics lists all available free care clinics that are known to them (including the Volunteers in Medicine America Clinics listed below). Part of their mission is to provide support to free care clinics and they make a strong effort to keep their listings up to date. Opportunities are searchable by Zip Code, City or State.

- **[Volunteers in Medicine America](#)**

Volunteers in Medicine America is a national network of free health care clinics that provide care for the uninsured and medically underserved. They are community-based and differ greatly in the resources they provide. Clinics can be found using an interactive map and are also listed by state.



### **Am I required to have an active professional license to volunteer?**

As long as you have a professional license in a particular state in the U.S. you are eligible to volunteer in that state. In some states it is possible to get a special volunteer medical license. Many clinics have a credentialing office that will inform you of the specific licensing needs in your state. See this [AMA resource](#) for more information for each state.

### **Do I need to carry malpractice insurance?**

This requirement varies. A clinic may cover its providers under their own malpractice insurance or federal programs (under the Federal Tort Claims Act) for volunteer providers. It's a good idea to ask about this when considering medical volunteering. (See this [AMA resource](#) for more information regarding liability for medical volunteers).

### **What if I am a "snowbird"?**

Many clinics welcome volunteers who are available for only several months throughout the year.

### **How much time is required to volunteer?**

The time commitment for volunteering is highly variable. Some providers volunteer every week for at least a half-day. Some can only volunteer one or two days a month. Some clinics ask that you commit to 3-4 hours once a week or once every other week. Most clinics can accommodate individual requests.

### **Who do I contact if I want to volunteer?**

Many clinics have a volunteer coordinator listed on their website. Most clinics will have an application available online that they require you to fill out to get things started.

### **Can volunteers request certain shifts? What if my availability changes?**

Many clinics allow you to select the times and days that you are available and that work best for you. In general, clinics work closely with their volunteers to accommodate changes in availability whenever possible.

### **Can I volunteer short-term?**

Many clinics will ask volunteers to commit to at least several months. Clinics are often all volunteer-based which makes it very hard for them to have a high turnover rate with short-term volunteers.



### **How do patients qualify for free care?**

Eligibility criteria vary by clinic. Representative eligibility criteria include: how much a person earns, lack of health insurance or being under-insured, being ineligible for state or marketplace insurance, or lacking Veteran's benefits. Some clinics rely on the "honor system" and simply provide care to those who request it. Patients in some clinics must be referred by a primary care provider but this requirement varies as well.

### **Who operates free care clinics?**

[Volunteers in Medicine America's](#) free medical clinics are community-operated, community-owned, and community-financed. The clinics typically depend on strong partnerships with local agencies, a volunteer staff including both medical professionals and lay volunteers, and the financial support of the community. Some clinics have a small paid staff to provide the core infrastructure to the clinic operations. While most clinics do not charge a fee, some request a small donation at the time of each visit. Other free care clinics are run by religious or academic institutions. For additional information please see these links: [Volunteers in Medicine America](#) or [National Association of Free & Charitable Clinics](#).

### **Are there any opportunities to volunteer remotely, by telehealth?**

Yes, in some settings, telehealth is an option. The [MAVEN Project](#) (Medical Alumni Volunteer Expert Network) connects volunteer specialist physicians with primary care providers. These volunteers provide virtual consultations, teaching and mentorship to community health clinics.

### **Are there ways to volunteer other than by providing patient care?**

Yes, in some settings education of patients or clinicians is an option – for example, you may be able to volunteer by creating patient information sheets or leading teaching sessions for primary care providers. If you're more interested in teaching or case discussion rather than direct patient care, you should ask about these options.

**If your question was not addressed in the FAQs above, please email it to us at:**

[VERA@Rheumatology.org](mailto:VERA@Rheumatology.org)