



Aurora Borealis Commissioned Officers Association Welcome Packet 2023-2024

Welcome to Alaska! We, the Aurora Borealis Branch of the Commissioned Officers Association (COA), would like to pass on some information you may find useful in orienting you to our branch, the activities we participate in, and the many benefits associated with a COA membership. Please do not hesitate to ask other PHS officers for help as well!

The mission of the COA is to protect and enhance the public health and safety of the United States by supporting and advancing the interests of the Commissioned Corps and its officers. COA is the only organization working exclusively on behalf of the Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Corps. To best support COA, our branch has several standing committees devoted to supporting this mission, which will be discussed below.

Your membership not only supports our local branch of COA but also goes to support what national COA can do for you and for us as officers. In addition, it gives opportunity for outreach activities, provides the most up-to-date information, and connects you with what is going on locally and nationally with the PHS.

Helpful links:

- To join, please visit <https://coausphs.org/> or visit our Aurora Borealis COA personal website at www.auroraborealiscoa.org. If you are an existing COA member, please join our branch by adding "Aurora Borealis (AK)" to your branch affiliations
- If you have any questions or when you decide to join, please contact our Membership Leads, LCDR Jessica Thompson (jkthompson@anthc.org) and LCDR Theresa Castellanos (TCastellanos@SouthcentralFoundation.com) so you are added to our listserv
- You can also find us on Instagram ([Instagram.com/auroraborealiscoa/](https://www.instagram.com/auroraborealiscoa/)) and Facebook ([facebook.com/auroraborealiscoa/](https://www.facebook.com/auroraborealiscoa/))

Meet our Executive Committee for 2023-2024:

President: LCDR Pam Finch (pfinch@SouthcentralFoundation.com)

President Elect: CDR Scott Mitchell (smitchell@SouthcentralFoundation.com)

Treasurer: LCDR Kate Manyoky (ylmanyoky@anthc.org)

Secretary: LCDR Tanya Sumner (tsumner@SouthcentralFoundation.com)

Standing Committees:

- Officer Development Forum – organizes presentations on hot topics for PHS officers such as tips for writing your COER, OS and ROS.
- Publications – helps to write, edit and format articles, suggest the proper location for publication and will submit articles on your behalf if requested.
- Uniform Committee – provides the most up to date information on uniform requirements, hosts presentations on proper uniform wear, inspects uniforms if requested, and will answer any other questions regarding uniforms.
- Membership – manages current & new members, promotes membership, updates and adds new members to the branch listserv and maintains the Welcome Packet for new members.
- Website – manages and updates all information on our Aurora Borealis COA website (auroraborealiscoa.org).
- Readiness Advocacy Team – keeps branch up to date on all basic readiness updates and changes and is available for annual physical fitness test (APFT) sign-offs.
- Promotion/Retirement Ceremony – organizes the annual promotion/retirement ceremony, including organizing sub-committees to help get the big job done.
- Community Outreach – organizes and disperses information to our branch on community outreach opportunities. If there is an event you are interested in, they will help you announce it to the branch to get volunteers.
- PHS Athletics – organizes and guides officers to lead PHS Athletic events. They will walk you through the entire process from becoming an event leader to submitting completed paperwork after the event has taken place. They also design and sell athletic clothing for our branch to wear!
- Social Committee leads organizing picnics and social events for officers and their families.

Participation on a committee is recommended. Please contact any of the officers listed above if you are interested in volunteering! Welcome to the area and let us know if you have any questions! We look forward to you joining our local branch and getting to know you!

V/r,

The Aurora Borealis COA Branch

Understanding the Value of a COA Membership

As a member of the Aurora Borealis branch of the COA, you are part of a group of distinguished officers working in securing Corps rights, benefits, and improvements for the Corps. COA advocates and actively works for the Surgeon General appointed from the ranks of career Corps officers (an expanded role in global health issues) and works for matters and concerns of our members. **COA is the only group that proactively reviews legislation to encourage both the legislative and executive branch decisions that advance public health, the Commissioned Corps, and the interest of COA members.** Many issues have opposed the PHS Commissioned Corps over the past 60 years, and COA has remained the only organization to exclusively work on behalf of officers to address these challenges. COA's efforts are proactive to ensure uniformity with our sister services. This was accomplished by collaborating with organizations such as the Reserve Officers Association, the Military Officers Association of America, the Association for Military Surgeons of the United States, and others who value the critical role the PHS Commissioned Corps to protect U.S. security and safety.

Matters concerning the future of the PHS Commissioned Corps have continued to be the primary focus of the association. Working through the Military Coalition, COA led the effort to defeat an administration proposal in 2002 to classify Commissioned Corps officers as civil servants for compensation purposes. The association has meanwhile been a foremost proponent for a major "transformation" of the PHS Commissioned Corps to better position it to meet new public health challenges.

In addition, COA provides multiple opportunities to become involved with our local communities to promote health and wellness. Some opportunities Aurora Borealis COA has been involved in are:

- The Aurora Borealis COA has submitted several articles published in *Frontline* highlighting achievements of our local officers.
- Aurora Borealis COA participates in multiple physical activity events in the community including multiple running events, triathlons and bicycling events. Several events in the past year also provided virtual options.
- Aurora Borealis COA has had many community outreach opportunities such as the drive thru flu vaccine clinics, COVID-19 Vaccine clinics, and naloxone kit training with Project HOPE.
- Several officers from Aurora Borealis COA volunteered to serve as judges and scored questions at the Health Occupations Students of America Conference from the student's online written tests.
- Aurora Borealis COA has had several officers participate as judges at the Alaska Science and Engineering fair ranging from elementary school to high school.
- Aurora Borealis COA helped distribute masks donated from an officer in Maryland and a few non-profit organizations across the nation. Due to these generous donations, masks were provided to Brother Francis Shelter, Covenant House, and Sullivan Arena.
- There are multiple updates and assistance options regarding basic readiness requirements such as completing the annual physical fitness test with other officers and reviewing COERs. Connections with other officers outside your category can give you a different perspective on being a part of the Corps.

Benefits that come with COA membership:

- Representation on Capitol Hill, including transferability of Post-9/11 GI Bill and whistle-blower protections
- All members of the USPHS Commissioned Corps and all employees of the U.S Department of Health and Human Services are eligible for 50% tuition discount on the following New York Medical College Public Health Programs

- Online MPH Degree: Behavioral Sciences and Health Promotion; Environmental Health Science; Health Policy and Management
- Certificates Programs: Environmental Health; Health Education; Industrial Hygiene; Public Health; Global Health; Emergency Preparedness
- Reduced tuition at the University of South Florida for Graduate Degrees and Certification Programs
- Because of COA efforts, Disney chose to include PHS and NOAA Corps officers as eligible for its Disney Military Promotional Tickets. In addition, they recently got Southwest and United Airlines to join Allegiant and Spirit Airlines in offering waived baggage fees to USPHS active-duty officers
- COA enables members to participate in several low-cost group insurance programs, including: Term Life, Disability Income, Long-Term Disability, Hospital Income Protection, Auto and Home, Emergency Assistance, and Pet Health Insurance
- Member Discount and Free Study Guide for Certified in Public Health (CPH) Exam

Whether you are joining COA for the first time or you are renewing your membership, the value of being a member is apparent. You can feel confident in COA and what they will do for you. Should you desire more information, please visit www.coausphs.org.