

**Commissioned Officers Association of the  
US Public Health Service**

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2021-2026

Protecting the interests of the USPHS  
Commissioned Corps since 1951.



The background of the page is a photograph of a parade. In the foreground, a group of people in white uniforms, likely a marching band or a ceremonial unit, are walking in a line. In the background, the Washington Monument is visible against a clear blue sky. There are green trees and a traffic light on the right side of the image. A large, dark blue, rounded rectangular overlay is positioned in the center of the page, containing the table of contents text.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Message from Our Chair ..... 1

Who We Are ..... 2

Our Planning Process ..... 4

Our Strategic Plan ..... 7

Our Next Steps ..... 9



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

Officers, Colleagues and Friends,

It gives me great pride and pleasure to introduce the Commissioned Officers Association's (COA) 2021-2026 Strategic Plan on behalf of the COA Board of Directors (BOD). Drafting this strategic plan was not easy due to leadership changes and multiple deployments during the pandemic. The BOD drafted this strategic plan during their annual workshop with facilitator Joan Goldberg, using Strategic Assessment & Solutions LLC. The BOD desired to have a plan that reflects the current landscape of the Commissioned Corps and the current needs of our members. After deliberation, the BOD feels this plan sets an accurate, clear, and bold direction for COA and serves as a guiding document for COA staff, COA committees and Local Branches. We believe it will help COA achieve its mission to support a strong and robust Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Corps and empower us to protect and promote the health and safety of the American people. We established new goals and objectives to address four priority areas: **Grow, Engage, Serve and Advocate.**

COA is a membership organization who supports and advances the interests of its members. We believe every active duty, reserve, and retired PHS commissioned officer should be a member of COA to further its ability to support our work as an organization. Yet currently not everyone is a member. When membership declines, the effectiveness of COA diminishes. We need strong, active Local Branches to carry the message of COA and demonstrate the impact of our efforts. As an organization we need to grow through strength in numbers, to further our objectives and accomplish our mission.

The time has come for the Commissioned Corps to cease remaining as an unknown entity to the American people. We at COA have an opportunity

to increase the visibility of the Public Health Service and the Commissioned Corps. To accomplish this, we don't just need members, we need engaged members. In the next five years, COA looks to publicize the good work of our officers and we look to our Local Branches to continue communicating their good work through our newsletter "Frontline," and by participating in community events.

When we engage, we serve. Service is in our name and what we do. In the next five years, COA will focus on serving our members. We will look to our members to communicate their needs and will need to know how COA and Local Branch leadership can better serve our members.

COA is much more than fighting for parity of benefits for Commissioned Corps officers. COA is an advocate, which speaks on behalf of our members in all arenas and in this time, as officers charge the front lines of a pandemic, and support care during natural disaster and humanitarian crises, officers need someone on their side to support them.

I am grateful for the members of COA, the COA staff, and the BOD who participated in constructing this plan. As we look toward implementation, I look forward to the growth, engagement, service, and advocacy of our members, the organization, and the Commissioned Corps.

**Commander Kelly Valente**  
Chair, Board of Directors 2021-2022



---

## WHO WE ARE

---

**The Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service (COA) is a non-profit, 501c (6), membership organization representing over 4,500 active duty and retired members of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.**

With more than 90 local branches, COA plays a vital role in addressing the needs of its members both within the U.S. and globally. The mission of 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. In meeting its commitment, the organization provides comprehensive member services, provides educational opportunities for health professionals, advocates for commissioned officers, collaborates with other public health and uniformed service organizations, and disseminates public and professional information. COA is governed by 17 elected members of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director who serves in an ex officio capacity.

Formally established in 1951, COA traces its origins to the 1920's when small groups of officers met informally to discuss issues of importance to the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (PHS) and public health. Many issues have confronted the PHS Commissioned Corps over the past 60 years, and COA has remained the only organization working exclusively on behalf of officers to address these challenges. These issues, in turn, have shaped COA's advocacy strategies and organizational structure.

Among the first challenges facing COA in the mid 1960's was a proposal to close the PHS hospitals and outpatient clinics. COA reached out to members of Congress and Congressional committees to enlist support, and for many years COA's efforts were instrumental in keeping the

hospitals and clinics open. While the hospitals were ultimately closed during the Reagan Administration, the relationships COA established with Congressional decision makers built an enduring foundation for future advocacy.

In the 1970's, another major challenge COA faced was a strong movement to abolish the PHS Commissioned Corps. COA strenuously fought back and successfully thwarted these attempts by securing support of numerous members of Congress as well as the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, and the Surgeon General.



COA's legislative efforts are not just defensive but are proactive. A major priority of COA is to ensure that the Commissioned Corps officers maintain parity with our sister services. This has been accomplished in great part through effective and sustained collaborations with partner organizations of The Military Coalition, and others who value the critical role of the PHS Commissioned Corps to protect US security and safety.

Issues of concern regarding the future of the PHS Commissioned Corps have continued to be a 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 then was a proponent for a major "transformation" of the PHS Commissioned Corps to better position it to meet new public health challenges of the 21st century.

COA understands better than any other organization the complex challenges that have faced the PHS Commissioned Corps for more than 200 years and how to best address those challenges to ensure the preservation of the nation's vital uniformed

service. Furthermore, COA recognizes the importance of having an organizational structure and strategic plan that promote effective communication between the membership and COA headquarters so, when needed, the membership can mobilize to "educate" Congress, local and state governments, and the public on PHS Commissioned Corps issues. COA understands the importance of building strong relationships with the Department of Health and Human Services, including the Office of the Surgeon General, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and Congress, as well as other associations that represent public health and the uniformed services.

In 2002, the Association undertook a strategic planning effort, resulting in a comprehensive document approved by the membership at the 2003 annual meeting. In 2009 and 2015, revised strategic plans were developed and approved for COA.

The mission of 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.



---

## OUR PLANNING PROCESS

---

The Association's five-year Strategic Plan for 2014-2019 was expiring when COA's Executive Director, Colonel (Ret.) James Currie, announced his retirement. At that time the Board of Directors Executive Committee and Search Committee determined that development of a new five-year plan would be a high-priority goal for the new Executive Director, with an implementation target of 2021.

On January 9, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a novel coronavirus-related pneumonia in Wuhan, China. The first case of coronavirus was confirmed in the United States on January 21, 2020. On January 31, 2020, WHO issued a Global Health Emergency, resulting in global air travel restrictions. A public health emergency was declared in the United States on February 3, 2020, and by February 23rd the CDC reported that COVID-19 was heading toward pandemic status. A COVID-19 pandemic was declared by the WHO on March 11th, 2020, and on March 13, President Donald Trump declared a National Emergency in the United States. Over the next few weeks, most PHS Commissioned Corps officers were preparing for deployment, already deployed, or working remotely from their homes.

COA's new Executive Director, Captain (Ret.) Jacqueline Rychnovsky, USN, was hired in May, 2020. Due to the pandemic, efforts to arrange an in-person Strategic Planning meeting were put on hold. To keep the process moving forward, the 2020-2021 Board Chair, RADM Brandon Taylor, and the Executive Director met with the 2014-2019 Strategic Planning Team in July 2020 to discuss lessons learned from their planning process. RADM Taylor then appointed a Strategic Planning Committee comprised of junior, senior, and retired COA

members who were tasked with leading the effort to revise this important roadmap for the Association's next five years. The Committee held bi-weekly video conference calls to develop the project starting in February 2021. After several months of significant scheduling challenges due to deployments, the Strategic Planning workgroup was dissolved. We thank the team who agreed to work on this initial revised plan and understand and appreciate the many challenges they faced during the pandemic.



## ORIGINAL STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

CATEGORY/ROLE	NAME
Environmental Health	Commander David Bales
Health Services	Commander Jennifer Bornemann
Dietitian	Lieutenant Commander Courtney Drevo
Pharmacist	Captain Violette Ganoe
Therapist	Commander Katie Jacques
Dental	Captain Michael Johnson
Physician	Captain Paul Jung
Nurse	Lieutenant Thornell Lewis
Veterinarian/Retired officer	Captain (Ret.) Hugh Mainzer
Scientist	Lieutenant Commander Gabriela Ramirez-Leon
Chair, Board of Directors	Rear Admiral Brandon Taylor
Chair-elect, Board of Directors	Commander Kelly Valente
Engineer	Lieutenant Bryan Wimer

In the summer of 2021, as the COVID-19 rates in the country declined and the vaccinations rates increased, the Board of Directors agreed to meet for their annual in-person meeting. An extra day was scheduled solely for the creation of a revised Strategic Plan. A professional facilitator was hired, and pre-work included a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats), a Member Survey, and collection of many financial, marketing, and membership metrics. Benchmarking reports were obtained from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). The Surgeon General, Director of Commissioned Corps Headquarters, and Chief Professional Officers (CPO) declined to be interviewed.

Armed with this background and input, the Board of Directors held a day-long meeting on August 6, 2021, at the Sheraton Hotel and Suites in Alexandria, Virginia. Approximately 75% of the Directors attended in person, with the remaining Directors attending remotely. The Committee's draft was circulated to the full COA Board for review and input, and then approval.

## 2021-2022 COA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BOARD OFFICER	DIRECTOR
Chair	Commander Kelly Valente
Chair-Elect	Commander Kristie Purdy
Treasurer	Commander Katie Jacques
Past Chair (ex-officio)	Rear Admiral Brandon Taylor
BOARD OFFICER	DIRECTOR
Dental	Captain Renee Joskow
Dietitian	Commander Kristie Purdy
Engineer	Lieutenant Commander Kurt Kesteloot
Environmental Health	Lieutenant Commander James Gooch
Health Services	Commander Alpa Patel-Larson
Medical	Lieutenant Commander Melissa Reyes
Nurse	Captain Christine Merenda
Pharmacist	Rear Admiral Brandon Taylor
Scientist	Lieutenant Commander Julia Zucco
Therapist	Commander Katie Jacques
Veterinarian	Commander Wanda Wilson-Egbe
Field Representative	Captain Karen Munoz
Field Representative	Captain Margaret Riggs
Field Representative	Commander Kelly Valente
Retired Officer	Captain (Ret.) Lisa Tonrey
Retired Officer	Captain (Ret.) Alan Echt
Retired Officer	Captain (Ret.) Regina Bennett
Executive Director/Ex-Officio	Captain (Ret.) Jacqueline Rychnovsky, USN

**We thank the 2021-2022 Board of Directors for tireless work on the revised plan.**



---

# OUR STRATEGIC PLAN – VISION, MISSION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

---

The approved Strategic Plan for 2021-2026 is as follows:

## VISION

The Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service is the vibrant, proactive, nationally-recognized member-based organization that supports and advocates for the PHS Commissioned Corps and its active duty, Ready Reserve, and retired officers.

## MISSION

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.

## 1. GROW

**COA will grow its membership by 2026 by:**

- Revising COA's mission and vision to emphasize what is most important to members, concisely, clearly, and inspirationally
- Reconsidering membership categories and dues pricing as well as analyzing membership benefits (tangible and intangible) and offerings to nonmembers to enhance the member value proposition
- Setting goals and timeline for membership retention and growth by category, mindful of the total universe of possible members
- Surveying members regularly about membership value and interests
- Rebranding COA
- Personalizing messaging to different member groups including those at different career stages
- Experimenting with diverse marketing approaches
- Tracking response to outreach
- Reshaping outreach based on analysis (tweak, continue or sunset)
- Helping members be COA ambassadors



## **2. ENGAGE**

**COA will further membership engagement, collegiality, networking, and participation in COA activities to promote unity, support members' well-being and success, share resources, and collaborate to achieve COA goals by:**

- Publicizing COA's new mission, goals, and vision to emphasize COA's commitment to supporting, empowering, and advocating for its membership
- Enhancing media experience by discussing and highlighting COA values and membership experiences
- Surveying members regularly about Local Branch experiences and wishes
- Encouraging and supporting Local Branch structure, initiations, maintenance, and membership
- Providing more Local Branch assistance to encourage consistency, viability, value, and connection to COA
- Reconsidering/reshaping networking opportunities
- Enhancing media presence by highlighting COA values and member experiences
- Tracking opportunities available to members for participation in COA activities and numbers of members who volunteer to participate, and developing new opportunities if needed
- Growing virtual networking events, e.g., lunches, happy hours, etc., recognizing time differences and what members value most
- Encouraging mentorship efforts
- Enlisting COA members in COA's advocacy efforts at local and federal levels

The Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service is the vibrant, proactive, nationally-recognized member-based organization that supports and advocates for the PHS Commissioned Corps and its active duty, Ready Reserve, and retired officers.

## **3. SERVE**

**COA will expand/reshape its programs to strengthen its value proposition for COA active duty, reserve, and retired officers by:**

- Surveying members regularly regarding interests, needs, and hopes, as well as preferred venues, platforms, and formats for information/assistance
- Reimagining the structure of Local Branches to better serve COA members
- Offering members and partners regular virtual and written resources addressing vital/popular topics such as career development, handling multiple deployments, disability, retirement, second careers, etc.
- Offering one-on-one support as needed
- Expanding leadership development programs in conjunction with the Foundation
- Surveying membership about the newsletter, and revising when indicated
- Offering Q&A sessions live and recorded, being mindful of time differences

## **4. ADVOCATE**

**COA will strengthen and amplify its voice advocating for Public Health Service Commissioned Corps officers by:**

- Expanding resources for training members in advocacy (e.g., letter-writing, Hill, or local representative visits)
- Simplifying lobbying/educating local and national representatives through provision of tools
- Increasing outreach to members to encourage participation in advocacy
- Highlighting inspiring case histories of activities, goals, and outcomes
- Increasing involvement in The Military Coalition
- Measuring and reporting on activities and outcomes monthly through updates and social media, including hash tagging ongoing efforts
- Increasing media presence regarding advocacy efforts through outreach to media

---

## OUR NEXT STEPS

---

Although the strategic plan has been approved and finalized, the work continues. Strategic planning is a continuous process that does not end at the development of a written plan; rather, it begins the process requiring effective implementation of the set goals and objectives.

This plan is intended to be a living and working document that will no doubt require updating and adjusting within its five-year timeframe. In addition to being posted on the COA website, the plan will be disseminated to COA members and COA Local Branches. Every year, the Executive Committee will review the plan, provide needed updates, and report to the COA Board and members. In addition, the plan set forth compliments the critical work carried out by our sister organization, the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF). We are proud to serve side by side with the COF to provide a full suite of services that protect the interests of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and its officers.

