

Navy joins Army, VA in call for retirees to help out amid pandemic

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The Navy is calling on former sailors to rejoin the fleet and help the military aid in the pandemic response, following similar requests from the Army and Veterans Affairs Department.

The calls for volunteers, all made this week, come as both the VA's medical staff and the Pentagon report a growing number of coronavirus cases. The Navy made its request on Thursday to current and retired sailors to stay in the service a little longer or come back to the fold, though it did not specifically seek out medical staff.

The Army has reached out to more than 800,000 retired service members to "gauge their willingness to assist with the Covid-19 pandemic response," and by Friday had heard from 14,600 people who have who expressed interest, Army spokesperson Lt. Col. Junel Jeffrey said in a statement. "The initial response has been very positive."

The Army is gauging the "capabilities of our retired career medical personnel to potentially assist with Covid-19 pandemic response efforts if needed. This extraordinary challenge requires equally extraordinary solutions," another Army spokesperson said in a statement.

In what capacity the soldiers will aid the effort is unclear for now, but Jeffrey said, "some were comments of support, while others fit the confines of our search and present good leads. We'll need to work through them [to] know for sure."

The Army is prioritizing those who served in eight positions, including critical care officers, anesthesiologists, nurse anesthetists, critical care nurses, nurse practitioners, emergency room nurses, respiratory specialists and medics.

Similarly, the Department of Veterans Affairs this week spearheaded a Twitter campaign to get the word out to retired medical personnel that the department is offering dual compensation waivers for those who can help bolster medical staff in VA facilities.

The repeated plea, especially targeting retired clinicians and federal health care providers, says "We NEED YOU! [Help us in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Consider #VA re-employment."

"This action helps give the department surge capacity as needed," [VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a statement](#).

The department is urging "interested retired physicians, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory technicians, respiratory therapists and other [medical professionals to register online](#)." According to the online form, those who reenter will assist in areas such as tele/virtual care, the national call center or direct patient care/support at a VA Medical Center.

A VA spokesperson did not return a request for comment on the number of sign-ups the department has received.

The Navy's request followed suit, making a pitch to members about to leave the service to prolong their careers by offering some economic incentives, according to [a Naval Administrative Notice circulated on Thursday](#).

The Navy said it would offer waivers and "even extra cash to stay put for now," according to a statement. A sailor can qualify for up to \$1,000 for each month they extend. "The incentives and extensions in this NAVADMIN will provide stability to both the Navy and our families," Thursday's notice reads.

"The Navy is on a deliberate path to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and maintain operational, Sailor and family readiness," Vice Adm. John Nowell, [the Navy's top personnel officer, said in a statement](#).

Cmdr. Dave Hecht, spokesperson for the chief of naval personnel, added that the goal of the announcement is to reach the maximum number of sailors, "so we can retain any Sailors who may be interested in staying Navy a little bit longer." They also want those who've separated to come back on active duty.

The deadline to submit requests for an extension is July 1, and those who are interested can apply through the MyNavy Career Center portal.

The Air Force said it is also weighing options to deploy medical professionals in the same vein.

"The Air Force is exploring a variety of methods to identify potential pools of medically-trained members who could augment our current medical professionals as we respond to COVID-19. Options being explored include utilizing medically-trained civilians who work in non-medical capacities and potential voluntary options for retired or separated military medical professionals to rejoin our ranks," Air Force spokesperson Lynn Kirby said in a statement.