

Indian American Volunteer Groups Sewa, HSS Committed to Vaccination Efforts in Philadelphia

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PHILADELPHIA, PA – Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), a non-profit organization that organizes values-based education programs and community outreach projects nationwide, has deployed a volunteer response team to support the City of Philadelphia, FEMA, and other government partners at the Center City Vaccination Center (CCVC). This site is equipped to deliver up to 6,000 doses of the lifesaving COVID-19 vaccine each day. It is the second federally supported community vaccination center in the nation to benefit from HSS's assistance. Sewa International and 25 organizations of the Indian American community in the greater Philadelphia region are working closely with HSS to offer support.

HSS has named their campaign "Sewa With FEMA." Sewa is an ancient Sanskrit word meaning "selfless service." HSS's on-site coordinator, Sachin Dabade, said, "It involves acting selflessly and helping others without any reward or personal gain, based on their Hindu faith and motto, 'The whole world is one family.'" Sewa and HSS have deployed 351 volunteers logging 2400 hours of support at the CCVC and 21 volunteers providing 98.5 hours at the Esperanza Community Vaccination Center.

Now more than ever, Sewa and HSS volunteers are impassioned to invest in U.S. vaccination efforts as India's COVID-19 case rates rapidly increase and its supply of oxygen tanks and medical resources decrease.

"They are incredibly eager to be here, and they have the drive to volunteer for a community that some of them are not even a part of," said Justice Colbert, emergency management specialist at FEMA Region III. "They show up ready to help Philadelphians with a positive attitude," and learn everything they can about emergency management so they can transfer their skills to future disaster deployments, she said.



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More than one dozen Indian American volunteers arrive daily to provide non-clinical support at the vaccination center, such as wheelchair escort assistance and traffic control.

“We are honored to serve in this national cause of ending the COVID-19 pandemic and sincerely thank the FEMA Region III team for giving us an opportunity to serve our brothers and sisters in Philadelphia,” said Mukund Kute, president of PA East Division of HSS. “We have distributed \$55,000 worth of PPE Kits, food and masks since early April 2020. We will continue to support FEMA until we beat COVID-19.”

“Whether during response, recovery, mitigation, or preparedness, voluntary organizations bring many unique resources and assets to help communities and individuals,” said Janice Barlow, Acting Regional Administrator for FEMA Region 3. “Our country’s volunteer organizations have provided organized services to those affected by disasters and public health emergencies, beginning with our nation’s first volunteer fire department established by Benjamin Franklin, right here in Philadelphia, in 1736. The contributions of volunteer organizations, like Sewa, are invaluable assets at the two federally supported Community Vaccination Centers in Philadelphia and across FEMA Region 3.”

Interagency cooperation which includes community-based organizations like local voluntary organizations, provides valuable insight to inform operational decisions before, during and after FEMA’s response missions. Engaging with voluntary organizations is critical to representing local perspectives and needs specific to communities that otherwise may not be obvious to external entities such as FEMA. Vaccine guests coming to the community vaccination centers appreciate seeing friendly faces with that local perspective.

To learn more about HSS/Sewa’s vaccination mission “Sewa With FEMA” visit:

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/IndoAmericans4CovidRelief>

<https://www.hssus.org/blog/indian-americans-serving-fema-philly>

HSS and SEWA International are one of several volunteer organizations supporting the COVID-19 response in Philadelphia. They are working closely with Team Rubicon, another trusted partner organization of FEMA.



To volunteer with HSS's FEMA Drive "Sewa With FEMA":
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C48AEA72FA4F8C07-sewa>

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Caption: Sewa volunteers conduct community outreach by canvassing in neighborhoods across Philadelphia to spread awareness about the Esperanza Community Vaccination Center and Center City Vaccination Center in Philadelphia, PA. (Photo by Heather Anderson/FEMA)



Caption: Sewa volunteers work alongside other volunteer organizations, like Team Rubicon, as well as the Pennsylvania National Guard to support the Center City Vaccination Center (Photo by Heather Anderson/FEMA).





Caption: A Sewa volunteer manages traffic control at the state-run, federally-supported Center City Community Vaccination Center in the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia. (Photo by Heather Anderson/FEMA)



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Caption: A Sewa volunteer assists a community member at the Center City Vaccination Center. (Photo by Heather Anderson/FEMA)

