

Call center volunteering offers rewarding experience

News Release Date

10-12-2021

POSTED: Oct. 12, 2021

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A crucial part of Clatsop County's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic is its Public Information Call Center.

Since almost the beginning of the outbreak, the PICC and its all-volunteer roster have performed the vital tasks of sharing information with residents and signing them up for testing, vaccinations, and other services.

As the response to the pandemic continues to evolve, with new directives on testing, booster shots, and, eventually, treatments, new volunteers are needed more than ever.

The PICC operates from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Volunteers work shifts of one-and-a-half or two hours. The number is (503) 325-8500.

"PICC volunteers are the heart and soul of our County's COVID-19 response," PICC Supervisor Ellie Jansen said. "We have a great sense of comradery here in the PICC. We all want to play our part in protecting our community, providing good information, and reducing the burden of the pandemic."

A number of PICC volunteers shared their reasons for signing up, and the rewards and challenges of the position.

"Helping with the COVID response seemed to be the right thing to do when the need was so great," retired federal worker Chris Woolsey of Gearhart said. "It's good for me to learn new things and being involved with the county's effort has been a very positive experience."

Like Woolsey and many others at the call center, Dr. Roy Little of Astoria came to the PICC after volunteering at community vaccination clinics.

"With respect to working at the PICC, it was in part to get a better understanding of how information on our local COVID response was being conveyed to the public and to learn more about what questions or concerns people in our area have."

The volunteers also agreed that keeping up with the ever-evolving information on vaccines, tests, and federal, state, and local guidance can be a challenge. PICC supervisors brief the

volunteers daily on new developments to make sure the information they're sharing is as accurate as possible.

"I've been very impressed with how well the PICC operational staff have organized this complex material to we volunteers," Little said.

"PICC volunteers are trained and given time to listen in to calls on their first shift, so they feel ready to take calls from the public," Jansen said. "The supervisors are here to support them in taking calls, navigating our booking system, and answering questions."

When vaccines became widely available earlier this year and community vaccination clinics were organized, PICC volunteers helped residents navigate the online sign-up system.

As vaccine demand has declined while vaccines have become more widely available, the PICC's main focus has shifted to taking appointments for the community drive-thru testing service at Camp Rilea. But many calls also involve helping individuals "gently" work through the decision to get a vaccine.

"I was so excited each time I was able to schedule someone for a COVID vaccine," retired Knappa schoolteacher Sandra van Meer said. "Everyone I have dealt with has been so polite and grateful. Each phone call has given me a sense of satisfaction."

"Initially, callers were happy to talk to someone with current information about vaccine availability and eligibility," retired educator/librarian Geri Fick of Astoria said. "Seniors especially were thrilled to be offered a vaccine appointment. We are now taking testing calls and again, callers are appreciative to talk to someone who can assist them in their time of need or give them reassurance."

"Volunteer work is rewarding in a lot of different ways," Mark Chadwick of Astoria said. "Not only am I helping individuals, I am helping the community. I would encourage anyone who has the time to volunteer."

[Go to this link to find out more about volunteering.](#)