

Wisconsin National Guard: Lending a helping hand at Milwaukee County alternate care facility

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WEST ALLIS, Wis. — Multiple Wisconsin National Guard teams are on site at the recently completed alternate care facility at Wisconsin's State Fair Park to lend a helping hand.

A team of Citizen Soldiers supported warehouse operations at the alternate care facility as it was setup, while another team of approximately 60 personnel are preparing to take on roles including patient care assistants, supply specialists, and miscellaneous support tasks at the facility.

Additional personnel from the Wisconsin National Guard are standing by to support the facility, if needed.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed the facility at Wisconsin State Fair Park in West Allis over the course of the past few weeks, and state and local officials are coordinating resources to staff and support the facility as it prepares to open in the coming days. The Guard's role represents only a fraction of the overall effort to resource the alternate care facility.

"We are helping organize the shipments that are coming into the warehouse here, and then we are helping bring all the material into setting up the rooms," said Sgt. Andrew Minster, a medic assigned to the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry. "I chose to enlist in the National Guard because this is what I wanted to do - to help my community out and help the state out."

Staff Sgt. Mark Affeltranger, a Soldier from the Eau Claire, Wisconsin-based 1st

Battalion, 128th Infantry, and the noncommissioned officer in charge of the Guard's warehouse mission at the alternate care facility, said he hopes that efforts at the alternate care facility can help relieve some of the stress on the state's hospitals.

"It's important to me to be a Citizen-Soldier because I love being in the military and giving back to my community," he said. "I always volunteer for missions like this because it's what I love to do, and I know I'm making a difference and helping out."

Sp. Cory Couineya, a medic assigned to the 1st Battalion, 120th Field Artillery based in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, said he was grateful for the opportunity to serve his state.

"It's nice to help out the community, do good things, and be a part of something that's bigger than just staying at home," he said.

The Wisconsin National Guard has fulfilled a variety of roles across the state since its response to the COVID-19 pandemic began after a March 12 public health emergency declaration from Gov. Tony Evers. Ongoing Wisconsin National Guard missions include a warehousing mission where 20 Citizen Soldiers are assisting the Wisconsin Department of Health Services at a state warehouse receiving personal protective equipment (PPE) shipments from around the state, repackaging them, and redistributing them to areas in need.

The Wisconsin National Guard is also standing up additional specimen collection teams to establish mobile COVID-19 testing sites as part of the state's efforts to increase testing capacity. Three teams are currently operating in Milwaukee County - one at the Milwaukee County House of Correction where they are collecting specimens from more than 900 staff and inmates at the facility - and two additional sites supporting health clinics in the City of Milwaukee. Additional teams are coming online in the coming days. The Guard mobilized approximately 225 additional troops to establish the additional specimen collection teams.

A National Guard team previously established a mobile specimen collection site at a senior living facility in Sheboygan April 5 to test staff and residents at the facility. In addition, teams of 12 troops are serving as medical and administrative staff at two separate state-run voluntary self-isolation facilities in Milwaukee and Madison, while another 30 are serving at a Milwaukee County-run self-isolation facility. Meanwhile a team of Guard members is supporting the Dane County Coroner's Office and assisting their office with mortuary affairs operations. The Wisconsin National Guard

has completed a number of other missions since the state's response began in March including when it sent a team of six medics to a senior living facility in Grafton for three days to augment the staff after a COVID-19 outbreak resulted in a temporary staffing shortage.

More than 2,400 Citizen Soldiers and Airmen mobilized to support the Wisconsin Elections Commission during the April 7 election, where they served as poll workers across 71 of Wisconsin's 72 counties. Guard troops also procured and distributed hand sanitizer, wipes, spray bottles, and PPE to polling sites statewide in advance of the election.

Guard members also transported a group of Wisconsin citizens returning from a cruise ship with confirmed COVID-19 cases back to their homes in mid-March after a weeks-long ordeal.

All told, more than 1,000 Citizen Soldiers and Airmen from the Wisconsin National Guard are now serving in direct support of the state's response to COVID-19 in a variety of statuses.