

'Wanted to contribute': Fired USAID workers start new group to help HIV programs. By Aimee Cho, NBC Washington, 7 Jan 2026

One of the groups they've helped offers HIV services in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Their director says they're struggling to stay afloat without USAID. After USAID was shut down amid Trump administration layoffs many of those fired workers say that hasn't stopped them from wanting to serve people in need. News4's Aimee Cho spoke with two former USAID workers who started a new volunteer group called Crisis in Care to help people around the world.

Two former U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) workers have started a new volunteer group called [Crisis in Care](#) to help people around the world.

The Trump administration shut down USAID last year. Many employees had just 10 minutes to pack up their desks. But several of those fired workers say it hasn't stopped them from wanting to serve people in need.

"I always thought of USAID as my dream job, really," Deborah Kaliel said. "Even before I got there, I thought, 'This is where I want to end up.'"

When she and Maury Mendenhall were deciding on careers, they both felt drawn to public service. Both spent 18 years at USAID, working on HIV programs for people in need around the world.

Mendenhall was also helping to start a program for victims of sexual abuse in Ethiopia.

But when the Trump administration began dismantling USAID, Kaliel and Mendenhall say they were terminated, forced to abandon the communities they'd served for years.

"This wasn't just a job that we were going to get a paycheck at," Kaliel said. "It was really who we were and who our identity was and it felt like it was just sort of ripped apart and literally thrown in the trash. So it was very traumatic, almost makes me cry thinking about that."

But they knew they wanted to keep the momentum going on HIV services. It's why they started a volunteer group called Crisis in Care. They hold events such as happy hours and comedy shows to raise money for the community groups they used to work with. They've already brought in more than \$116,000, much of it from former USAID colleagues.

"It's, I think, a real testimony to USAID as well, that when all of this happened, we were fired, but the money that we had, we wanted to contribute to the local partners that we'd worked with in the past," Mendenhall said.

One of the groups to which they've donated, Kheth'impilo DRC, offers HIV services in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Its director, Dr. Bomby Kabongo, says they're struggling to stay afloat without USAID and for him, it's been heartbreaking.

"To see desperate people, vulnerable people, to know — knowing what you could do to help but being unable to do so," he said.

Dr. Kabongo says he often pays for patients out of his own pocket and he's grateful for the donations from Crisis in Care.

"More than a lifesaver for us as an organization and for our patients," he said.

Kaliel told us: "It's been wonderful to find ways to have joy together, despite all the sadness. And I think from our former colleagues, people have really appreciated the chance to connect and come together for a good cause."

An analysis by a Boston University epidemiologist estimates more than 730,000 people around the world have died because of cuts to foreign aid. Some of the causes of death include malaria, tuberculosis, pneumonia and HIV.