

# Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander



**HAWAI'I  
COVID-19**

Response Recovery Resilience

**TEAM**

June 18, 2020

TO: **Senate Special Committee on COVID-19**

Chair, Sen. Donovan Dela Cruz

Sen. Jarrett Keohokalole

Sen. Michelle Kidani

Sen. Donna Mercado Kim

Sen. Sharon Moriwaki

Sen. Kurt Fevella

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**Aloha \* Talofa \* Yokwe \* Kaselehlie \* Alii \* Hafa adai \* Mālō e lelei \* greetings,**

The Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Hawai'i COVID-19 Response, Recovery, and Resilience Team is a collective of more than thirty organizations that directly serve in Hawai'i's Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI)<sup>1</sup> communities, which comprise at least 25% State's population.<sup>2</sup> In the last several weeks, team stakeholders have identified some early priorities around COVID-19 related policies, issues and activities within the state. The Team also plans to release a more comprehensive plan later in July.

*Priority Concerns Identified as of June 18, 2020:*

- **Fiscal Transparency.** Based on information from the Governor's Office of Federal Aid Management, almost \$2 billion in COVID-19 aid was appropriated for Hawai'i. To date, approximately \$1.3 billion has been received to support COVID-19 recovery efforts in health, human services, education, economic stimulus, social support, environmental infrastructure, and more. We believe that transparency and open communication from our local and state government units are imperative at this time, as the distribution of these dollars to communities – including NHPI communities – is unclear and unreported. Fiscal transparency assures that state and local leadership are accountable to the public. Clear, understandable, and accurate information ensures that resources are distributed equitably throughout Hawai'i and reach NHPI communities.
  - *NHPI inclusion.* To date, meaningful efforts to include Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in participatory discussions, decision-making processes, and funding plans/agreements are lacking. The expertise we bring from our respective communities to leadership tables will enhance the planning and successful implementation of strategies for response, recovery, and resilience that will be good for all Hawai'i.

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<sup>1</sup> We define "Native Hawaiian" using the terminology from the Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act, which indicates that Native Hawaiians are a "distinct and unique indigenous people with a historical continuity to the original inhabitants of the Hawaiian archipelago whose society was organized as a Nation prior to the arrival of the first nonindigenous people in 1778" (42 USC § 11701(1)) and Pacific Islanders as the distinct and unique indigenous peoples descended from the original inhabitants of the nations within Oceania. Together, "Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander" or "NHPI" refers to dozens of distinct peoples, languages, and cultures, all of which we recognize as important voices.

<sup>2</sup> Fogelman, C. (2018). "Demographic, Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics for Selected Race Groups in Hawaii." Research and Economic Analysis Division (READ), Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism (DBEDT), State of Hawaii. Available at [http://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/census/acs/Report/SelectedRacesCharacteristics\\_HawaiiReport.pdf](http://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/census/acs/Report/SelectedRacesCharacteristics_HawaiiReport.pdf)

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- *Alternative strategies.* We recognize that identifying issues is only part of the work needed to support communities and will continue to discuss different paths forward, such as 1) Exploring a “COVID Risk tax” on incoming travellers to address sustainable funding options to continue supporting testing, contact tracing and other related expenses related to this pandemic and 2) Developing strategic representation of NHPI voices in all state departments, furthering the HRS § 226-20<sup>3</sup> intent to “prioritize programs, services, interventions, and activities that address identified social determinants of health” for our communities.
- **COVID-19 Testing Strategy.** We are here to ensure that residents remain safe from new disease introduction and subsequent waves of COVID-19. The state of Hawai‘i has established its intent to reopen businesses and tourism. Yet the state has not identified how required or targeted testing, particularly in at-risk populations such as NHPI communities, will be performed. We believe that testing strategies will work best when NH & PI communities are part of the planning and implementation processes. Our team stands ready to help local and state leaders to create robust and effective COVID-19 testing strategies, objectives, and plans that are culturally and linguistically safe and effective within the communities we serve.
- **Contact Tracing Needs.** The value of Hawai‘i’s CHWs cannot be underestimated – they are best able to perform contact tracing for the communities where they live and work due to their strong relationships and knowledge of their communities and cultural norms that increase participation. Stakeholders on the Team call for community health workers (CHWs) to be included in Hawai'i's paid contact tracing staff because of their integral role as health workers who are from the communities they serve.

CHWs build and maintain trust with individuals, families, and neighborhoods; their valuable understanding of cultural norms and practices, language, and patterns of gatekeeping is essential. In Hawai‘i’s rural communities, it will be especially important to include CHWs as members of the contact tracing team. They have outstanding networks that can help locate and educate community members where telephone and physical address are sometimes not available. Some community groups may also require additional cultural consultants to effectively communicate and implement public health measures.

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<sup>3</sup> Hawai‘i Revised Statutes § 226-20. State of Hawai‘i. Available at [https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/hrscurrent/Vol04\\_Ch0201-0257/HRS0226/HRS\\_0226-0020.htm](https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/hrscurrent/Vol04_Ch0201-0257/HRS0226/HRS_0226-0020.htm)

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Members of our consortium with access to some of the most hard-to-reach areas are available to train, deploy, monitor, report, and serve as liaisons with CHWs.

- **Data Requirements.** Problems with the collection, management, analysis, and reporting of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander data have been a longstanding issue before COVID-19. Now, these data concerns are critical to prevention, containment, and treatment strategies while understanding COVID-19's impact on our communities. Brett P. Giroir, MD, Assistant Secretary for Health, recently commented that demographic data collection will allow for assurance that equitable access to testing and accurate analyses of COVID-19 burden on vulnerable groups.<sup>4</sup>
  - *Disaggregation of the Data.* Disaggregation of race/ethnicity data is particularly emphasized for NHPs, an umbrella term that encompasses dozens of discrete communities in the Pacific which include: Native Hawaiians, Samoans, Tongans, Chamorro/Guamanian, Marshallese, and Chuukese, just to name a few. We need to collect data on specific Pacific Islander categories to best know how to direct resources and services. We also need to define our Pacific Islander groups in culturally meaningful ways – meaning that Pacific Islander categories include individuals with both full and part ancestry. These data collection and coding are important in data reporting requirements being upheld by local department and state agencies. These requirements are essential steps to enable an accurate and appropriate response for NHPI communities throughout the pandemic and economic recovery.
  - *Anticipation of Data Review.* In collecting, disaggregating and utilizing the data, we must be mindful on the impacts, both positive and negative, on our communities to avoid confusion or potential discrimination.
- **Community-Based, Culturally Centered Research.** In addition to data disaggregation, subsequent community-based research and evaluation are needed. We propose community-based, culturally centered research to understand, and respond to, the primary and secondary impacts of COVID-19 on NHPI communities. Such research and evaluation should include assessing the impacts of state and county stay-at-home orders, safer-at-home campaigns, social distancing mandates, unemployment claims, employment and benefits loss, small business impacts, education disruptions, and health indicators on NHPI individuals, families and communities.

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "HHS Announces New Laboratory Data Reporting Guidance for COVID-19 Testing." June 4, 2020. Available at <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/06/04/hhs-announces-new-laboratory-data-reporting-guidance-for-covid-19-testing.html>

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Rapid community-based needs assessment, research and evaluation is necessary in a time where rapid response is the rule rather than the exception. Reliance on academic sources of research and continental U.S. responses limits the wealth of immediate, on-the-ground mana‘o (knowledge) and community expertise (‘ike). Our traditional ways of knowing and practice-based evidence in NHPI communities should not be dismissed.

We believe serious, meaningful collaboration between communities and institutions of higher education will produce relevant research to inform programs and resourcing for long-term recovery and resilience. Not only for NHPI communities, but for Hawai‘i, all islands, and underserved areas. Engaging NHPI scholars and researchers in this process will be critical for cultural and linguistic competency.

- **Communications.** Ongoing community-specific communications should be prioritized. Education about hygiene, social distancing, mental health, emergency preparedness, accessing services and resources, quality care, testing and vaccinations are critical.

We are here to help train, deploy, monitor and report successes of tailored communications that can be utilized effectively and appropriately within the NHPI communities we work. Our members are ready to support local and state leaders with technical assistance and consultation to ensure communication materials are free of bias, offensive and discriminatory language, or racist content, imagery, and dissemination tactics.

Further, based on rapid community-based needs assessments, we are uniquely equipped to supply the communications and public information the NHPI community is currently lacking. This includes translation of materials for Pacific Islander community members whose written and spoken languages are not English.

Lōkahi. In closing, the team recognizes that many coalitions and organizations in Hawai‘i and across the United States have similar concerns and calls to action in order to protect communities. We stand in solidarity with Black, Indigenous and other People of Color experiencing disproportionate impact.

We will continue building out specific policy recommendations, identifying concerns of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities, and calling for meaningful participation at every level.

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Signed,

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Dr. Sheri Daniels, Executive Director, Papa Ola Lōkahi, Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Hawai'i COVID-19 Response, Recovery, and Resilience Team Co-Lead

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Josie Howard, Executive Director, We Are Oceania, Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Hawai'i COVID-19 Response, Recovery, and Resilience Team Co-Lead

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Dr. Joseph Keawe'aimoku Kaholokula, Chair, Native Hawaiian Health, John A. Burns School of Medicine, Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Hawai'i COVID-19 Response, Recovery, and Resilience Team Co-Lead

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Felea'i Tau, Communications and Special Assistant to the Lieutenant Governor, Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Hawai'i COVID-19 Response, Recovery, and Resilience Team Co-Lead

To learn more about our network:

Website [www.NHPICVIDHawaii.net](http://www.NHPICVIDHawaii.net)

E-mail [NHPICVID@papaolalokahi.org](mailto:NHPICVID@papaolalokahi.org)

To join a workgroup and participate in shaping the report with recommendations:

[www.surveymonkey.com/r/585NVYT](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/585NVYT)