

# Hawai'i Journal of Health and Social Welfare Special Issue on Health Disparities in US Affiliated Pacific Islanders: The Voyage Forward

Introduction by Guest Editors: Neal A. Palafox MD, MPH and Lee Buenconsejo-Lum MD

Auwe! We celebrate the completion of a 4-year voyage of this special issue of the Hawai'i Journal of Health and Social Welfare titled "*Health Disparities in US Affiliated Pacific Islanders: The Voyage Forward*." In April 2016, a call for papers was made for this issue to build sufficient health and surveillance data that would provide a more precise understanding of health and health care disparities in the US Affiliated Pacific Island (USAPI) jurisdictions. A section called "Lessons Learned from the Field" was planned to provide a space for understudied community based innovative policies, practices, and programs affecting USAPI population health.

"*The Voyage Forward*" is the fourth special publication of the USAPI journey towards improving health and health care in the US Affiliated Pacific. Each of the publications was sponsored through a now 18-year partnership between the Cancer Council of the Pacific Islands (CCPI), Federal Partners, Hawai'i State Advocates, and the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health (DFMCH) at the John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM).

The first special publication was "Cancer in the Pacific" in the Pacific Health Dialog (PHD) in September 2004 (Vol. 11, No. 2). Led by a partnership between Papa Ola Lokahi and the DFMCH - JABSOM, the issue housed manuscripts about the evolving Cancer Council of the Pacific Islands (CCPI), described cancer disparities in Hawai'i and in Native Hawaiians, and accumulated the available cancer data throughout the USAPI. The role of Pacific Island networks in Hawai'i and the continental United States was discussed, and the systematic development of Native Hawaiian researchers was presented as an innovative cancer initiative.

The second in the series entitled "Developing Human Resources for Health in the Pacific" was published in March 2007 in the PHD (Vol. 14, No. 1). The PHD issue spoke to building health-care capacity in the USAPI through human resource training, distance education, and professional development.

The third in the series was published in the Hawai'i Medical Journal (Vol. 69, No. 6, Suppl. 3, June 2010). This edition gathered articles addressing health disparities in Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in Hawai'i and cervical cancer screening in the USAPI and in the migrants from the Compact of Free Association (COFA) nations. Several articles described

the health disparities of COFA migrants in Hawai'i in terms of social justice and politically generated structural barriers. Health policy promotion, building distance communications throughout the Pacific, and academic-community partnerships, and new centers of learning at the University of Hawai'i John A. Burns School of Medicine were described as paths forward.

There were three major goals for "*The Voyage Forward*." First, was to bring new knowledge from the Pacific that addresses health disparities in the USAPI. Second, was to ensure that a significant proportion of the narrative describing the new knowledge was conceptualized and narrated by the indigenous peoples of the USAPI through a Pacific-centric lens. Third, that the internal and external partners of the CCPI would nurture, assist, support, and continue "*The Voyage Forward*."

Iebjeltok is the Marshallese saying for voyagers bringing gifts to the community. The basket "Ieb" is facing the community in offering "jeltok". The voyage landed new knowledge in the previously uncharted waters. The first six articles, written by indigenous and local peoples, include topics regarding collaborating with traditional leaders and chiefs in Yap and Pohnpei. While building non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention programs, these innovative programs focused on developing health systems management tools to synergize programs using a limited number of committed staff and affecting community policies, systems, and environments to reduce NCD risk behaviors. Affecting change in the culture through institutions of the culture is a turning point in the health and health care disparities dialogue as the process empowers the community by promoting community agency.

Nine manuscripts led by academic-based authors, some Indigenous Pacific Islanders, speak to specific issues. The academic authors begin with articles about the association of otitis media and dental caries in Palau, and breast cancer in Guam. Two articles explore e-health needs and development in Pohnpei and Majuro, followed by a report of a cervical cancer research project in Guam that encounters incompatible international digital connectivity that hinders research progress.

Gathering data, using a National HINTS format is made relevant through community focus groups input on the survey content and design; and we learn how refugee women's health in the Northeastern United States may inform the migrant Pacific

Islanders about advocating for reproductive health during the Pacific diaspora. Two manuscripts, caregiving in Yap and palliative care in the Marshall Islands, describe the development of these programs in a community-based cultural framework and note that these programs may be adapted and scaled throughout the Pacific.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention brings the voyage close to shore with the last three manuscripts about cancer mortality data, cancer registries, and an adapted canoe logic model.

The final manuscript, co-authored by the Hawai'i based nephrologist who developed hemodialysis and renal disease monitoring programs in the USAPI, speak to the health care and health financing implications across the USAPI and brings this leg of the voyage to anchor.

### Indigenous Pacific Authors

In much of the Pacific health and healthcare literature the observer, funder, creator, and disseminator of the narrative was an academic, a funder, or other interested Pacificans. Rarely did the indigenous community stakeholder take the lead. This special issue moves us deeper towards some Pacific health interventions through a community and indigenous Pacific peoples point of view. Sharing health narratives in this manner reframes common representations that emphasize structural limitations, including academia, at the expense of Pacific peoples.

This “*Voyage Forward*” issue speaks to legitimizing norms and interventions of Pacific peoples around disease control and outcomes. The world-view of the Pacific peoples, who come from island countries with small populations and small economies, as powerless within the global context can create a geographic, economic, and scientifically deterministic framework, which becomes a limiting populous belief. This special issue “*Voyage Forward*” is in and of itself a population health intervention and serves to establish the assets that the Pacific and Pacificans hold to affect their own health outcomes.

This edition challenges the myth that the dissemination of science can only be legitimized by academics and scientific institutions. Rather, the interdependence of community, academics, funders, and federal partners, working in a culturally-centric manner allows a relevant multi-view narrative to emerge. Western cultural hegemony then fades in the Pacific. The indigenous community role in the creations, presentation, and dissemination of new knowledge in a Western format illustrates versatile self-agency.

Honoring the diversity of Pacifican authors (Table 1) and partners who were part of the foundation of “*The Voyage Forward*,” we note participation by peoples with the following ancestry: 21 Filipinos, 7 Asian Indian, 5 Japanese, 4 Koreans, 4 Chinese, 1 Vietnamese, 5 Black Americans, and 33 Caucasians.

Ethnicity	Number	Non-Academic	Academic	Belonging to Federal Agencies
Chamorro	10	6	4	0
Palauan	7	7	0	0
Marshallese	3	2	1	0
Pohnpeian	2	2	0	0
Yapese	2	2	0	0
Kosraean	1	0	1	0
Papua New Guinean	1	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>

### Conclusion

“*Health Disparities in US Affiliated Pacific Islanders: The Voyage Forward*” navigated to its goal, to provide and disseminate new knowledge in the domains of surveillance data and interventions, which mitigate health disparities in the USAPI. The voyage also served a purpose greater than the content of the individual articles, as it moved disparities science towards a Pacific-centric point of view.

This issue reflects the resilience of Pacific Peoples - demonstrating Pacific peoples, their community, and their cultural frameworks are assets and are essential to address USAPI health disparities. Pacific peoples writing their own narratives about their interventions, in their communities defines their norm from their own lens, and that they are in charge of developing, describing, and interpreting their circumstance.

The special issue demonstrates that the USAPI Pacific Islanders can share their narratives in a scientific health-related peer-reviewed format, that their work can be written by Pacific peoples to meet the standards of Western scholarship. Further, the Pacific peoples authors are from the community, from the health systems, those who are students, as well as academics. This reframing in the course of sharing health intervention narratives not only allows us to challenge the structural limitations of peer-reviewed publication, which may be at the expense of Pacific peoples, but also enables us to center indigenous world-views and agency in relation predominant Western science and global academic control.

Over the course of the series, in addition to an evolution in the types of authors, there has been an evolution in the content - there is descriptive and observational research, but also translational research that is T4 and T5 type research where interventions are tested in real life then institutionalized by the community. At the T6 global level - the information is applied throughout the USAPI.

And finally - in order to complete this edition of HJHSW, the Editorial Board, the Chief editors, the key staff journal staff along with the academics, supporting and Federal funders exercised great patience, institutional tolerance, flexibility, as they heard a repetitive - "almost-soon," when asked when will the issue arrive to port. It supports the idea of the collective community-academic-federal partnership. The fleet of canoes landed together with more than what it originally set out to do. It was indeed a collective effort, about the collective - now in digital ink.

The voyage continues –

Si Yu'us Ma'ase, Mahalo, Mesulang, Kinisou Chapur, Kallahngan, Kommol Tata, Fa'afetai Tele Lava, Kulo Malulap, Oloomway, Kammagar

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