

Hawai'i Journal of Health and Social Welfare Special Issue on *The Impact of COVID-19 on the Health and Social Welfare of the People of Hawai'i*

Introduction by Guest Editors: Kristine Qureshi PhD, RN and Lee E. Buenconsejo-Lum MD

Introduction

Aloha, this special supplement issue of the Hawai'i Journal of Health and Social Welfare presents key findings from a statewide assessment - *The Impact of COVID-19 on the Health and Social Welfare of the People of Hawai'i*. The assessment, conducted at the height of Hawaii's novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) surge in August-September 2020, surveyed people across the state to identify areas of need due to the pandemic. Community partners also generated recommendations to address the needs identified. The findings and recommendations reported in this supplement provide a baseline to understand the impact, needs, and threats to the health and social welfare of individuals and their families across the state of Hawai'i. As this publication went to press in July 2021, the 4th COVID-19 surge began in the United States and globally. Aside from significant morbidity and mortality, long-lasting economic, health, and educational impacts are coming into focus.

Methods

In April 2020, the state activated its' Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) operations using the incident command structure. Within this structure, under the Operations Section, the State-Essential Functions-8 Medical/Public Health Branch was activated, including a Community Care/Outreach Unit (CCO Unit). The CCO Unit identified capacity, needs, and threats to community members resulting from the pandemic. The CCO Unit included members from many sectors, including the University of Hawai'i, the Hawai'i State Department of Health (HDOH), the Hawai'i Department of Human Services, and representatives from the Native Hawaiian, Filipino, Pacific Islander, and elderly communities.

Recognizing that an adequate COVID-19 response would require support from health and social service agencies across the state, the CCO Unit first conducted a rapid needs assessment of these organizations in May 2020.¹ A total of 121 organizations responded to the survey and identified vital resources and issues to be addressed for a well-coordinated response: food/hunger; mental health services; job loss, financial strain and loss of health insurance; and inadequate COVID-19 resources such as access to PPE, cleaning supplies, quarantine, and testing. Additionally, organizations recognized the need for rapid expansion of telehealth capacity, which augmented the findings of a larger HI-EMA telemedicine needs assessment conducted

in the same time frame.² The Community Based Organizational Capacity and Needs for COVID-19 Response and Recovery assessment report was provided to the HI-EMA, HDOH, and critical partners and informed planning to support health and social service organizations and the populations they serve.

The CCO Unit conducted a second survey from August 12-September 5, 2020, coincidentally at the peak of Hawaii's first COVID-19 surge. *The Impact of COVID-19 on the Health and Social Welfare of Individuals Across the State of Hawai'i* aimed to discern impacts at the time of the survey and likely in the subsequent 3 months. The CCO Unit community members provided significant input into the development, distribution, and analysis of the survey results.

Results

Across the state, 7927 people responded to the survey. The robust response rate was large enough to analyze the data for the state as a whole, by county, and by each of the 3 ethnic groups disproportionately represented in COVID-19 cases and deaths (Pacific Islander, Filipino, and Native Hawaiian). The findings indicated that the pandemic negatively impacted many individuals and their families across the state. One-third of respondents reported a loss of work hours, more than half had at least one household member with a chronic disease. Within 3 months from the time of the survey, about one quarter anticipated they would have trouble paying for essentials, such as food, rent/mortgage, utility bills, health care, and medicines. Some respondents highlighted challenges with applying for social services. While most considered COVID-19 to be a serious disease, there was only a moderate level of knowledge about the disease and a low level of pandemic preparedness in the home. The community partners from the Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, and Filipino communities shared the results with community members. Each group developed a series of recommendations to mitigate COVID-19 in their community. These recommendations were included in the full report to HI-EMA and used for future planning and response.

Vulnerability of Pacific Islanders

Pacific Islanders have suffered disproportionately in every aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Two additional articles in this issue provide a broader context. "A Historical and Contemporary Review of the Contextualization and Social Determinants of

Health of Micronesian Migrants in the United States” helps explain the source of disparities that existed before COVID-19, which were magnified by the pandemic and response. The final article, “COVID-19 Containment Ship Model: A Case Study for Pacific Island Response,” draws an analogy between ships and small island jurisdictions regarding isolation, limited resources, and potential outcomes based on planning and response. These articles highlight the unique vulnerabilities of small populations and remote islands (including the Hawaiian islands) and illustrate the importance of forethought and inclusive planning.

Acknowledgments

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Conflict of Interest

None of the authors identify a conflict of interest.

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