

Ulu Kukui o Kaulike

From State Legislation That Integrates Native Hawaiian Values Toward Investment in Medicaid

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Overview

Within 10 years, cross-sectoral research and community planning successfully shaped legislation to codify a state commitment to addressing health disparities among Native Hawaiians across all agencies. In 2020, \$17 billion will be invested in Medicaid programs that connect cultural values to social determinants of health (SDOH) in Hawai'i through 2030. This effort has been led by the Native Hawaiian community, for the Native Hawaiian community.

Snapshot

This snapshot will walk participants through an example where the government has a role in positively impacting racial justice and health equity for Native Hawaiians. **Ulu Kukui o Kaulike** is a culturally grounded policy walk that will flow from the traditional metaphor of a *kukui* grove for justice and equity by exploring Native Hawaiian health and well-being successes experienced over the last decade. The *kukui* is the official tree of Hawai'i and of deep cultural and spiritual importance to *Kānaka Maoli* (Native Hawaiians, indigenous people of Hawai'i). *Kukui* trees are common on each island and widely known in Hawai'i for their healing benefits. Each station of this snapshot follows 7 stages of the *kukui* growth as an interactive way to share knowledge emphasizing a process aligned to an authentic Native Hawaiian Culture of Health:

1. Cultural foundation
2. Community cohesion
3. Equity research and policy analyses
4. Systems advocacy
5. Legislative compliance and enforcement
6. Investment for SDOH and disparate populations
7. Population strengthening



Problem Statement

Native Hawaiians are experiencing a public health crisis where their health disparities and social inequities are higher than any other ethnic group in Hawai'i. Government officials, organizational leaders, and health care professionals in Hawai'i are constantly faced with assertions about Native Hawaiian health, but lack tools necessary to make systemic changes to improve health outcomes among its Indigenous people.

Innovation

This snapshot focuses on the processes and results of creating community lead policy that commits to addressing SDOH inclusive of cultural values to overcome disparities and progress toward equity. The traditional Hawaiian framework of *Mauli Ola* balances physical, emotional, mental, environmental and spiritual health of Native Hawaiians and was utilized to outline the SDOH priorities amending HRS §226-20. This law mandates that all state agencies in Hawai'i should include SDOH in policy planning and government resourcing that prioritizes reducing disparities.

Outcomes

Realizing innovation for health equity in Hawai'i is a step in the right direction to overall social justice for Native Hawaiians in their own homeland. As demonstrated in this snapshot of the past 10 years (2010 -2019), and 10 years of work ahead (2020-2030), three core areas are necessary to resist health disparities and improve the health of *Kānaka Maoli*: Population Health, Well-being, Equity. A Native Hawaiian Culture of Health will not be achieved by focusing on each action area alone, but by recognizing the interdependence of each area. Implementing systemic policy change takes time; in our experience it requires an abundance of community cohesion and a culture-based foundation to plan action toward goals we seek. This work takes us beyond typical public health and medical models to establish new norms and expectations from a Hawaiian worldview.

Future Implications

Applied research and equity analysis have a distinct role in policy planning to support targeted services, evidence-based interventions and prevention programs that are proven successes in improving well-being outcomes for Native Hawaiians. In 2020, a statewide investment of \$17 billion for Medicaid beneficiaries will directly link key efforts to reduce health disparities and prioritize the whole person health of Native Hawaiians. The growth of this *kukui* grove represents the advancement of racial justice for *Kānaka Maoli*. May the *kukui* serve as a contemporary reminder to light the way ahead for all of us and the important changes we pursue.

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A snapshot of innovation to advance equity for Native Hawaiians—and eliminate health disparities—within one generation

