

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Thank you for your interest in the Department of Human Services (DHS). One year has passed since I joined DHS, and I remain as inspired and positive as day one.

I'm motivated by our dedicated and skilled team members who repeatedly share that they are here to: "create access to health coverage for one more family," or "make sure one more child is safe," or "ensure that this young parent has access to childcare and job training," or "provide former foster youth with stipends to go to college." This is challenging work, and our team of more than 2,000 is committed to the integral role DHS plays in rebuilding the bridge to community resources and self-sufficiency for Hawai'i residents.

Traditionally, DHS has been viewed as a safety net because many of our clients and beneficiaries interface with us after something necessitates them needing assistance. I ask readers to **see DHS as a trampoline that empowers and restores people to health, safety, and well-being** rather than "just a safety net." Through the investment in DHS and its programs, we can collectively invest in local residents and, ultimately, a healthy Hawai'i.

To get to a healthy Hawai'i, we need to look at the root causes for why we are not yet there. These root causes are called the social determinants of health, which include food security, housing, employment, access to healthcare, childcare, education, and more. The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco explains it best: "Your zip code is more important than your genetic code in determining your health."

It is through the DHS programs discussed in this annual report that we can collectively move the needle on community health and improve economic, health, and housing outcomes. For example, our SNAP program addresses food security. We focus on sustainable housing through our Homeless Programs Office and Hawai'i Public Housing Authority. Our Benefits, Employment, and Support Services Division, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Social Services Division all provide various employment, training, and education opportunities. And our Med-QUEST Division provides access to healthcare for more than 50% of Hawai'i's children and one in four residents.

We are committed to this work through four main priorities:

1. Investing in children and families;
2. Improving health and safety;
3. Increasing departmental capacity and efficiencies; and
4. Improving systems.

These also align with Governor Ige's core commitments to effective, efficient, and open government, education, affordable housing, health (and access to healthcare), and Hawai'i's economy.

DIRECTOR MESSAGE (cont.)

A few highlighted achievements from this year represent these same priorities and commitments:

- **Investing in children and families.** The Office of Youth Services (OYS) continued to help spearhead the State's effort in juvenile justice reform through Act 201 (2014 Legislature), which aims to reduce secure confinement, strengthen community supervision, focus resources on practices proven to reduce recidivism. In FY2015, a 20% drop in admissions to the Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility occurred as a result of the collaborative efforts among stakeholders working to improve the juvenile justice system.
- **Improving health and safety and Improving systems.** Our Med-QUEST Division successfully implemented QUEST Integration on January 1, 2015. QUEST Integration (QI) was planned over two years to combine the QUEST and QUEST Expanded Access (QExA) programs into one program, and it provides for a more patient-centric approach to care. With enrollment in one of the five available health plans, recipients no longer need to change to a different health plan and find new doctors because they turn 65 years of age or become disabled. Those who are aged, blind, and disabled also have more health plans from which to choose: five rather than the two under QExA. Another QI goal is to reduce administrative burden on health providers.
- **Increasing departmental capacity and efficiencies.** BESSD (Benefit, Employment & Support Services Division) received a \$660,462 SNAP performance bonus for placing in the top six states in the country for timely processing of SNAP (food assistance) applications. As of September 2015, SNAP timeliness rate was at 96.7%, and an estimated 183,680 Hawai'i residents were receiving SNAP benefits.
- **Improving systems.** The Commission on the Status of Women assisted in passing a resolution before the Honolulu City Council which would start a domestic violence task force with the police and the prosecutor's office and assist in shoring up gaps in services for victims of domestic violence.

This coming year will include DHS incorporating a new multigenerational approach, 'Ohana Nui, that invests early and concurrently in children and families to improve health outcomes. We will do so with other state departments and community stakeholders, and this will also allow us to more efficiently align programs and funding to make a bigger impact on those whom we serve.

Thank you for your support of DHS, our team, and our shared community.



Rachael Wong, DrPH
Director, Department of Human Services