The view from Huliau in Kahului, Maui
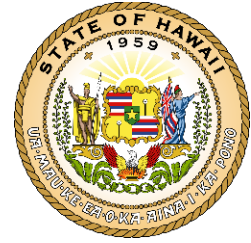
Housing First and Ohana Zones Evaluation Final Recommendations

YEAR 5: December 2023

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Executive Summary

After five years, is Ohana Zones successful? Yes! When asked to "try something new," Hawaii's homeless service system surpassed expectations, and more people accessed permanent housing and services (Collaborative Quality Consulting, 2021). Ohana Zones (Act 209) required six programs, and 18 were launched at the height of the five-year pilot (2020–21), accelerating the implementation of the Housing First approach. After five years, Hawaii's progress is evident on the national stage, moving from the highest rates of homelessness in the nation down to fifth place after Washington D.C., California, Vermont, and Oregon, though the most extreme rates of unsheltered homelessness persist (HUD, 2022).

Ohana Zones is also an exceptional success because it is Hawaii's first locally funded statewide effort to address homelessness. This endeavor is significant because:

- Central coordination by the Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness allowed the state to reclaim local priorities distinct from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
- Unrestricted funding allowed counties to address specific and immediate needs.
- Collaboration among the Governor, State, and Counties lead to better outcomes.
- Less restrictions allowed previously ineligible people to be housed.

This evaluation uses Active Implementation Frameworks, a best practice Implementation Science model that provides a systems perspective on the interconnected activities among stakeholders across the homeless service system (National Implementation Research Network, 2023). This model uses overarching frameworks to reflect ongoing interactions in complex systems. This "big picture" thinking is important because, without a proven method to guide system change, it takes 30+ years to bring new policies into practice (Gleeson, 2017).

The pages ahead capture key lessons. First, Ohana Zones accelerated Housing First practice. A key driver of progress is the compassion and skill of the workforce. Challenges with organizational structures like databases, communications, and contracting hindered progress. With great attention to addressing homelessness across a growing number of sectors, there is incentive for interjurisdictional collaboration to leverage funding and impact. However, the collective leadership structure promotes ambiguity, and overregulation creates barriers that limit achievement and potentially undermine progress.

Year 5 final recommendations build on achievements related to recommendations from Years 2–4: increasing and stabilizing funds, investing in competency-based workforce development, and upgrading contract monitoring methods. The following recommendations are offered:

1. Include legal, audit, and finance departments in cross-jurisdictional collaboration to improve efficiency and effectiveness.
2. Align individual legislative proposals with specific items in an overall strategic plan.
3. Generate unified action through proactive internal and external communications.

The solution is in process, and the following narrative explains how it's happening and what is further required to end homelessness in Hawaii.

Evaluation Overview

Purpose

The purpose of this five-year evaluation (2018–23) is to understand:

- The impact of the Housing First policy and the Ohana Zones initiative (Act 209) on increasing access to permanent housing; and
- What further is required to end homelessness in Hawaii.

Methodology

This evaluation uses an Implementation Science (IS) approach to assess the impact of Ohana Zones and Housing First implementation. IS is the study of making change within complex systems. It is important because, without a proven implementation method, more than 70 percent of system change efforts fail (Gleeson, 2017). While there is a great need for IS in public services where policy implementation is ongoing, the disconnect between research and practice has kept IS shelved until recently.

Active Implementation Frameworks (AI) is the best practice IS model that guides analysis and reporting. This model is preferred because it uses frameworks that reflect ongoing activities among people making change in the real world (Metz, 2021):

1. **Context** – Situational influences that impact change
2. **Stages** – Sequence of tasks required for change
3. **Drivers –** Core activities among: leadership, practitioners, and organizations
4. **Improvement Cycles** – Feedback loops that help teams get better
5. **Communications** – Focused and consistent messaging to target audiences

This is a mixed-methods evaluation, as previously detailed, which incorporates literature review, structured interviews, ethnography, and observation to inform findings and recommendations (2018–23).

Evaluation Team

Our team brings together diverse expertise to inform this work. Suzanne Wagner and Andrea White, Principals at Housing Innovations, share executive guidance, content expertise, and international perspectives on homeless services with 35+ years of leadership. Heather Henderson, Leader at Focalize (previously known as Collaborative Quality Consulting), leads research design and reporting. Megan Smith provides research coordination and copy editing. Learn more at focalizechange.com.

Context

An overview of context provides general background about the circumstances surrounding the implementation of Ohana Zones and Housing First.

Global

The world witnessed significant developments in 2023. Across the globe, housing continues to be a major crisis due to rising property prices and limited affordable housing options. Some nations are adopting innovative solutions like modular construction and sustainable housing to address the shortage (Morrison, 2023). Tragically, in the United States, unsheltered people outnumber those in homeless shelters (HUD, 2022).

Other trends showcased a mixed picture. In terms of the environment, 2023 saw increased international cooperation to combat climate change in the face of an onslaught of environmental emergencies (United Nations, 2023). More countries committed to achieving net-zero emissions and adopted ambitious green energy targets, and implementation of those goals will require unprecedented effort. Some regions experienced economic growth and job creation in emerging sectors such as technology and renewable energy; others, like service industries, struggled due to technological automation. As COVID-19 relief funds evaporate, more Americans are falling into poverty—the 2022 poverty rate was 0.6 percentage points higher than the pre-pandemic rate of 11.8 percent in 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Local

In Hawaii, 2023 was a year of challenge and opportunity punctuated by two crises. Public water supply issues created severe health challenges for Red Hill–area residents for months; now, the U.S. Navy is defueling tanks to prevent further contamination of the water supply (EPA, 2023). Water accessibility is also a theme in the August 8 wildfires on Maui that killed at least 100 people, highlighting the dangerous limits of a water system where private companies control the supply (Izadi & Murphy, 2023). Just 60 days after the tragedy, West Maui reopened while continuing to search for a strategic path to restoration.

The wildfires on Maui highlight Hawaii's top concerns, especially housing, employment, and the environment. Statewide, the median sales price for a single-family home in Hawaii reached an all-time high of $851,500, making homeownership increasingly unattainable for many residents (Tyndall, Bond-Smith, & Inafuku, 2023). In 2022, the median price for a one-bedroom apartment in Honolulu was $1,630 per month, an 11.6 percent increase over a year earlier. Further, there's a severe shortage of affordable rentals across the state, a crisis that is, in part, due to landlords selling their properties and evicting tenants (Taylor, 2022).

To address the housing crisis, state lawmakers have been working on measures to achieve the projected need for 50,156+ units by 2025, including the development of affordable housing units, rent control policies, and emergency proclamations (Fujii-Oride, 2019; Statewide Office on Homelessness and

Housing Solutions, 2023). The Maui wildfires also illustrate Hawaii's vulnerability to climate change and the importance of the aim to achieve 100 percent clean energy by 2045 (HRS 225P-5, 2022).

While employment has shown resilience after the pandemic, pay rates are far out of pace with inflation, as 44 percent of Hawaii residents live in or near poverty (State of Hawaii, 2023; Aloha United Way, 2022). As a result, residents struggle to find affordable housing in a largely unregulated market. While homelessness persists with more people sleeping outdoors, Hawaii drops from the highest rates of homelessness in the country down to fifth place (HUD, 2023).

Implementation Stages

"Stages" represent the sequence of events that take place when making systemic change (National Implementation Research Network, 2023). Previous reports established that Ohana Zones catalyzed the Housing First approach at the height of implementation. Distinctions between the implementation approaches reveal insights into improving outcomes in the future.

Housing First

The Housing First (HF) approach is an evidence-driven model to address homelessness that promotes housing as a priority, not a reward (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2022). As previously reported, the implementation of HF has occurred incrementally across the state with variable timelines and measures. The City and County of Honolulu launched the first HF pilot in 2012. Later, in 2016, the State's Homeless Programs Office provided intensive statewide training to contracted service providers and transitioned to performance-based contracts aligned with HF principles. This was the first statewide HF effort, which gave way to increased housing placements for homeless people.

Today, HF is widely recognized across the state, but local experts relay that HF implementation is variable (Collaborative Quality Consulting, 2019–20). Overall, the HF philosophy provides context for specific policy initiatives. Moving forward to full implementation can yield greatly improved outcomes. There are opportunities to improve collective impact by aligning budgets, contracts, processes, training, and practice tools to achieve high-fidelity, housing-focused practice. These opportunities are discussed further in the remaining frameworks and recommendations of this report.

Ohana Zones

In 2018, the Hawaii Legislature enacted Ohana Zones (Act 209), allocating $30 million to Hawaii's first statewide, time-limited "pilot" to address homelessness, with an additional $2 million in 2019 (Act 128). Ohana Zones continues the legacy of promoting the practice of Native Hawaiian cultural values through public policy, a distinguishing characteristic of local law: "Members of an ohana, whether or not related by blood, treat each other as extended family and share generously with each other. The legislature finds that building upon this ethic of ohana presents an opportunity to improve the lives of people experiencing homelessness" (S.B. 2401, 2018).

An Ohana Zone is a place: (1) That has a program to address the basic needs of individuals experiencing homelessness; and (2) Where wraparound services, social and health care services, transportation, and other services may be offered to ease poverty and transition individuals experiencing homelessness into affordable housing. This $32 million investment gave County governments the flexibility to use funds to "try something new" to increase access to housing. Coordination among eight government offices generated greater collective impact. Six Ohana Zones sites were required by law, and the Counties ultimately delivered 18 Ohana Zones programs during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–21). According to 2020 Homeless Management Information Systems data, during this time, rates of housing placement reached highs of 76 percent.

Implementation Drivers

Implementation "Drivers" help us understand the day-to-day interactions that propel system change: leadership, competencies, and organizational infrastructure, as seen below (Fixsen et al., 2015). Aligning the drivers to a common goal generates progress. Below is an explanation and further analysis of each driver.

Leadership

Leaders have a vision and inspire teams to reach a common goal. This requires technical and adaptive strategies to overcome barriers and keep teams moving forward (National Implementation Research Network, 2023). In Hawaii, leaders face exceptional challenges to alignment, since the state is the most highly regulated in the country, where jurisdictional boundaries can easily hinder progress toward a collective target (Hawaii State Legislature, 2021).

In this context, the collective leadership structure of Hawaii's homeless service system is a uniquely flat, interdisciplinary collective with funding and budgets segmented across 19+ government bodies. The size and complexity of the leadership structure reflects the need for coordinated strategic planning. Toward that end, representatives from these groups and others comprise the Hawaii Interagency Council on Homelessness (HICH), the State's central coordinating and implementation body for its strategic agenda. HICH provides a forum to build alignment and capacity to implement the Green Administration's five priorities, a bold start to a more comprehensive implementation plan (Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions, 2023):

1. Expand Housing Inventory for Houseless Individuals Using Every Tool
2. Test New Solutions to Long-Term Affordable Communities (Including Non-Traditional Housing)
3. Create More Space for those with Mental or Behavioral Health Needs
4. Clear the Obstacles Along the Pathway from Street to Home
5. Call Everyone Back to Community and Aloha

Legislation regarding HICH ensures that the public and all interested parties are duly notified and welcome to participate, which is critical to uphold transparency and accountability.

Beyond HICH, there are more than 15 coexisting plans with overlapping—and sometimes conflicting—agendas regarding affordable housing development and homeless services, though essentials like budget, financing, performance measures, and timelines are often missing (Collaborative Quality Consulting, 2019). Limited metrics lead to limited impact, leaving stakeholders to defer to guidance from federal oversight entities like the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). However, progress toward ending homelessness in Hawaii is hampered when federal and local goals are misaligned. While local leaders are dedicated to ending homelessness, HUD's primary focus is managing HUD programs (M. Chandler, personal communication, 2021).
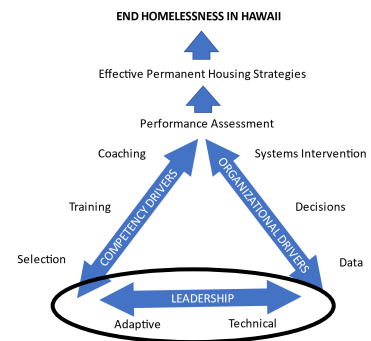
Competencies

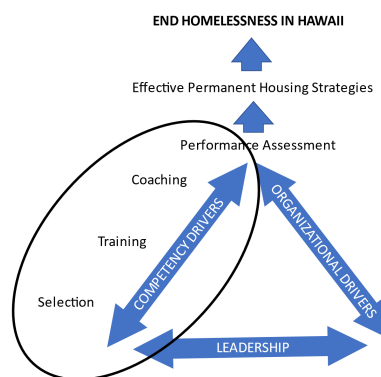Professional competencies are teachable, observable skills needed to be successful at a job, and learning these skills is optimized by competency-based training (National Implementation Research Network, 2023). Competency-based training is distinct from the traditional lecture-and-test method because it provides practice for job skills. When a competency-based approach is used for job training in homeless services, more workers succeed at helping people find a home.

The greatest asset of Hawaii's homeless service system is the people who work in it. With direct service jobs paying $17.00–$25.00 per hour, 56–80 percent of the average salary in the state, it is clear that many in the workforce are motivated by an interest in community service rather than income (Indeed, 2023; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Workers reflect diverse professional and life experiences. As such, professional development is key to building workforce capacity for high-fidelity, housing-focused services.

As previously reported, a survey was conducted during this evaluation to learn about the competencies required to be a successful housing worker. Top responses included: assessment, engagement, knowledge of the system/subject, data access and entry, documentation, and prioritization. One highlight of the survey was the resounding acknowledgement that "compassion" is essential in service, worth noting since compassion is a value rather than a skill (Schwarz, 2005).

END HOMELESSNESS IN HAWAII

Effective Permanent Housing Strategies

Performance Assessment

Coaching

Training

Selection

COMPETENCY DRIVERS

ORGANIZATIONAL DRIVERS

LEADERSHIP

A compassionate approach embodies trauma-informed practice, where clients are not blamed for having challenges. This serves to reduce the typical power differential between social workers and clients, leading to stronger client engagement and better results. Several agencies are continuing to build job-specific training infused with Native Hawaiian culture, which makes social work practice in Hawaii unique and a topic to be explored in further research.

The next step to promoting a competency-based training system is to codify the case management process from start to finish. This exercise establishes a shared understanding of how services are provided across agencies. It starts by mapping the path of clients through the permanent housing process as it occurs across organizations. The competencies required to carry out the process inform a comprehensive approach to training workers in the skills or competencies they need to conduct high-quality casework.

Recent efforts to invest in workforce development are promising. In 2019, a HUD technical assistance (TA) team convened Oahu Continuum of Care (CoC) members for a client mapping exercise. More recently, the County of Hawaii is investing in the development of a competency-based professional development system for housing caseworkers and supervisors countywide. In addition, an exciting intersection between public services and University of Hawaii Community Colleges is developing through the Good Jobs Hawaii program—an impressive offering of certifications to prepare residents for jobs in the local public sector, including community health worker and community case management certifications (University of Hawaii Community Colleges, 2023).

Organizational

Organizational drivers are the administrative information, decisions, and resources that guide practice. This includes data collection, policy, legal, contracting, quality assurance/improvement, fiscal, and human resources. The integrity of data within systems of record is key to all of these functions, as these databases hold the primary references for policy and practice decisions. However, this is challenging to achieve in Hawaii's sprawling field of outdated, segmented public service databases. Efforts to streamline and update systems and performance metrics are widely reported, though success is yet to be realized (Dayton, 2023).

END HOMELESSNESS IN HAWAII

Effective Permanent Housing Strategies

Performance Assessment

Systems Intervention

Decisions

Data

COMPETENCY DRIVERS

ORGANIZATIONAL DRIVERS

LEADERSHIP
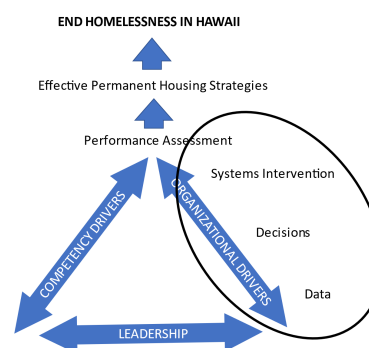
Within homeless services, the Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) is the federally approved methodology that informs data collection for many homeless service programs. In recent years, Hawaii's two Continuum of Care split their central database into two separate platforms, Case worthy and BitFocus. These databases are used to capture client information for HUD-funded and some state-funded homeless services, about 10,000 records in total. While HUD data standards provide a guide, the calculations informing elements in the two databases are not the same. Statewide reporting requires integration; because of this database variance, ensuring reliability of statewide data is challenging. Overall, Hawaii's HUD-focused data collection system undercounts the results of the homeless service system because locally and privately funded program outcomes are not included in Case worthy or BitFocus. In fact, most Ohana Zones program participant data is not entered into these databases at all.

Limited information sharing can also be a barrier to cost savings. As a result, spending can happen with cursory consideration for initiatives in other divisions and jurisdictions. This has the potential to create funding duplication and imbalance. For example, at Oahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC), officials estimate one in every three inmates is homeless, and many are there due to nonviolent offenses related to homelessness (Lincoln, 2014). In 2022, Hawaii had a population of approximately 5,600 inmates, costing the State about $52,000 per inmate per year (S.B. 2532, 2022). Conversely, community-based supportive housing, which costs the State an average of $20,000–$30,000 per person per year, is funded at a lower rate but is an effective strategy to maintain public safety, save money, and reduce prison overcrowding (State of Hawaii, 2022).

While new and sustained funding is critical, opportunities exist for realizing "new" funds within the current budgets if an inclusive, systems approach is embraced. Sharing budgets and contract templates across divisions and jurisdictions is a step in that direction. With increased knowledge of overall budgets, State and County jurisdictions could issue contracts with complementary scopes of work with longer terms. Specific policy priorities in each sector can be leveraged and aligned through comprehensive strategic planning.

The expense of solving homelessness requires new partnerships to access external funds for infrastructure, capital development, operations, individual benefits, and support. While a comprehensive discussion of affordable housing funding is beyond the scope of this evaluation, there are several to be explored. Resources are included in the Opportunities section of this report (see p. 23).

Improvement Cycles

Improvement is a process rather than an event; however, typical contract monitoring methods are focused on reacting to isolated events or data points to generate better performance. The results? A multi-point corrective action plan that yields restricted progress. Hawaii's government tends to use such compliance-based methods and financial audits to monitor programs, and leaders across the state voice the need for better ways to foster performance improvement for government contracts (Collaborative Quality Consulting, 2021). Without standardized proven methods, many leaders resort to short-term contracts that reduce the consequences of underperformance. However, as detailed, this approach also undermines investment in high-quality implementation and sustainable progress, which requires adequate time to actualize.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate the confines of compliance-based monitoring. For example, in recent years, the Homeless Programs Office (HPO) used performance payments to manage contracts. Providers were given 85 percent of their contracted budget and received the remaining 15 percent payment if performance measures were achieved. This approach was met with resistance and intermittent implementation and was ultimately stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic. HPO also saw that the rates of permanent housing placement increased in some counties, inviting an opportunity to explore other methods of performance improvement.

Today, HPO is engaged in implementing a proven approach to strengthening services—Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). CQI is a model that embraces the change process by using data to inform a four-step process to improvement: Plan, Do, Study, Act, as reflected in the diagram above. CQI has been the business standard for more than 50 years, and experts are calling for its use in public services to achieve better outcomes (Wulczyn, et al., 2014). HPO's statewide CQI initiative has the potential to scale across government divisions and jurisdictions to generate a common approach and language for improvement.
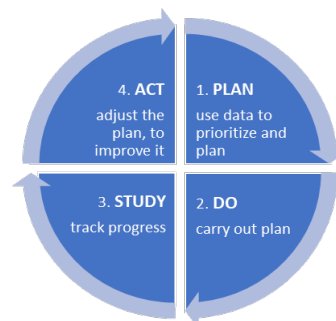
Communication

Internal

Internal communication refers to the messages, meetings, and channels for sharing information and making decisions among people who work together. As previously referenced, segmented leadership has the potential to lead to segmented internal communications. However, one COVID-era innovation that has greatly leveraged statewide participation in decision-making and strategic implementation is the use of online meeting platforms.

In pre-COVID days, it was typical to "fly in" to another island for specific events and conversations, which created financial and scheduling barriers. As online meetings have become commonplace, participation in homeless service system meetings has skyrocketed, with as many as 400+ participants attending weekly/monthly Behavioral Health and Homelessness Statewide Unified Response Group (BHHSURG) meetings in 2020–21, a collaborative communication channel between the Department of Health, Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness, and Homeless Programs Office.

In addition, a robust series of meetings was developed to provide leaders across the state more opportunities to learn, collaborate, and problem-solve, and there is an opportunity to reignite this type of communication post-pandemic. The eagerness to communicate presents an opportunity to refine messages and channels for particular audiences. For example, it may be helpful to focus on strategic priorities with executives and practice-related issues with practitioners. Additionally, email can be an effective tool for sharing information, which leaves more meeting time for making decisions, problem-solving, and planning.

External

External communication refers to the messages the homeless service system shares with the public, media, and legislators. While homelessness in Hawaii receives elevated media attention, external communications tend to respond to issues or crises. The greatest source of attention to the issue is complaint calls. For example, the Honolulu Police Department receives 400,000+ homeless-related complaints a year (Collaborative Quality Consulting, 2021). This puts first responders in a reactive mode, and they often end up responding to the most persistent callers instead of the most severe or urgent situations.

Proactive communication helps people learn about homelessness and efforts to solve it through a unified message that is tailored to specific audiences. For each audience, a call to action guides activities in a way that aligns with the system's priorities and initiatives. External channels where key messages can be regularly shared include television, social media, print, events, and telephone calls. Through storytelling, the issue of homelessness can be reframed and humanized, rather than positioned as a crisis that demands reactionary action. Messaging for external communications is often derived from a strategic plan. The Green Administration's five priorities are key building blocks of a coordinated communications plan.

Teamwork

Despite bureaucratic barriers, leaders across Hawaii demonstrate collaborative excellence, yielding extraordinary achievements in teamwork across the evaluation period. These successes include:

- Surpassing Ohana Zones goals

- Sustaining the lowest rates of COVID-19 infection in the nation

- Rapid distribution of rental assistance (City and County of Honolulu, Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, and Partners in Care)

These situations all have one thing in common—a collaborative approach (Wujec, 2010). This approach comprises:

- An urgent and specific timeframe

- One shared goal

- Allowing for adjustments

- Specific outcomes

- Adequate funding

Leaders and team members across the system demonstrated exemplary compassion and consistently surpassed expectations of respective roles to get and keep people safely housed. The following anecdotes illustrate these efforts.

- In Maui County, when a tiny home shelter opened before a non-profit provider could be contracted, the staff of the Office of Housing and Human Concerns, including the director, operated the facility themselves (Collaborative Quality Consulting, 2020).

- During the setup of Homeless Outreach and Navigation for Unsheltered Persons (HONU), when park maintenance staff were occupied with other responsibilities, Honolulu Police Department mowed the lawn, cleaned the bathrooms, cleared rubbish, and prepared the site at Waipahu Cultural Gardens (Collaborative Quality Consulting, 2020).

- When a new resident arrived at the Villages of Ma'ili with her children after escaping a violent situation, fear made it difficult for her to function, so managers posted a security officer outside her unit until a restraining order was in place (Collaborative Quality Consulting, 2020).

These are just a few of the countless examples of extraordinary practice evident across the system during the evaluation period.

Practice Assessment

Ohana Zones (2018–23) has sparked great achievements and invaluable lessons. One remarkable aspect is the flexible spending that allowed county leaders to select specific programs that served people who needed housing and help the most.

Program Categories

Four categories of Ohana Zones programs[1] were developed:

- Supportive housing
- Housing vouchers
- Outreach
- Emergency shelters

People Served

Populations reflect the community-specific priorities identified within each County:

- **Domestic Violence (DV)** – Domestic violence is pervasive in Hawaii, and stopping it requires specific attention. According to the CDC, one in three women and one in four men in Hawaii have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. (Hawaii State Public Library System, 2022).

- **Seniors** – A growing portion of unsheltered people in Hawaii are singles over 65 years old who have been homeless for many years. Much of this suffering has resulted from deinstitutionalization after the reversal of the Community Mental Health Act (1981) (Morrissey & Goldman, 1986).

- **Families** – Poverty and financial instability in single-parent households drive family homelessness, where 44 percent of local families live close to or near poverty (Aloha United Way, 2022).

- **Unaccompanied youth** – Native Hawaiian 18-to-24-year-olds are the fastest-growing segment of homeless people in Hawaii (Yuan, et al., 2018). While young people are quicker to resolve their housing issues, typical services do not accommodate their distinct needs (UNICEF, 1989).

- **Unsheltered people with severe mental illness** – The population of unsheltered people has skyrocketed since the reversal of the Community Mental Health Act (1981), which resulted in catastrophic rates of homelessness among people with severe mental health needs. After 40+ years, many have experienced decades on the street or camping.

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[1] This was previously reported as five Ohana Zones categories, the fifth being Family Assessment Centers, which are now included in the Emergency Shelters category.

Outcomes

At the completion of the five-year pilot, 7 of 18, or 39 percent of, programs remain open. Nine of the 11 program closures were due to administrative or regulatory issues including: limited contract timeline, lack of on-site champion, lack of implementation support, lack of contractor quality improvement methods, and/or limited funding. Only two programs were closed due to underperformance. They also had the shortest contract timelines (one year). Of those open, most are supportive housing programs, and all of them have received additional sources of funding. The total number of people served at each project is detailed in the Appendix (see p. 26).[2] Please see the Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions (SOHHS) for methodology and official Ohana Zones and statewide data 2022–23.

Remaining Ohana Zones Programs

The six supportive housing projects and the Homeless Outreach and HONU emergency shelter remain open using Ohana Zones funding, seven Ohana Zones programs total. In addition Ulu Wini, a family shelter on Hawaii Island remains operational with County funding. All of these initiatives share a commitment to a long-term vision and collaboration with diverse partners. They also provide important lessons in housing development and program design.

Supportive Housing

There are six supportive housing Ohana Zones projects across the state: Kamaoku, Huliau, Kealaula, Kumuwai, Hale Maluhia, and Keaolahou, which are detailed throughout this evaluation. These 136 housing units represent tireless collaboration and fortitude to complete the complex development process, which was eased by the allowances of emergency proclamations for this initiative. They also represent less than 1 percent of the projected 50,156+ total housing units needed by 2025 (SMS, 2019). While funding is available, a primary barrier to housing development is the regulatory and permitting process (Tsai, 2022). Experts have also called for updating housing policy to include "by right '' development—equitable creation of affordable housing across communities—to overcome community-specific barriers (Hawaiian Community Assets, 2021). However logical the policy, enacting this legislation will likely be met with protest.

Costs beyond housing cannot be ignored. Funds for infrastructure, like grading, environmental assessment, water, sewer, solar, and internet service are limited, highlighting an emerging need for private investment and new partners. Comprehensive studies reveal limitations in publicly owned developable land across the state (SMS, 2019). This calls for partnerships with private landowners, new

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[2] Data was captured from multiple sources for purposes of this report only. Please see the Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions (SOHHS) for methodology and officially verified Ohana Zones data for number of people served, beds preserved, new beds added, and rates of placement into permanent housing 2022–23. In addition, please see SOHHS for statewide data including: population of homeless people, time to placement, rates of placement into permanent housing, and affordable housing units.

levels of community support, and the exploration of new funding streams. A list of potential funding sources can be found in the Opportunities section of this report (see p. 23).

One strategy to generate support is to include community assets in affordable housing developments. Daycare centers, gardens, playgrounds, boutique retail stores, maker spaces, meeting rooms, commercial kitchens, tool libraries, free stores, skate parks, and recreation spaces provide a benefit for the existing community in exchange for embracing new neighbors. There is also interest in making supportive housing developments self-sustaining. This goal is more realistic when such community assets and related social enterprise are part of the plan.

Keeping people stabilized requires more than just housing. For everyone, especially vulnerable people, a supportive community context is essential to ensure "the people of Hawaii are thriving through . . . services that encourage self-sufficiency and support well-being." This vision, promoted by the Department of Human Services' Ohana Nui approach, is a local adaptation of the Social Determinants of Health, which are defined by specific domains: housing, health and wellness, social capital, economic support, education, and food and nutrition (Yoskioka, 2018). Considering these domains in the planning, design, financing, and operations of a community is critical to ensuring that people can remain housed and thrive as members of society.

While there is increasing investment in supportive housing, strict regulations exclude some of the poorest unsheltered people from HUD-funded properties. Thus, local funds, like Ohana Zones, are a great asset in creating innovative housing models to address local needs. One concept gaining momentum for housing unsheltered people is the renaissance of an ancient Hawaiian housing practice called "kauhale." These are villages composed of clustered housing and communal areas for cooking and gathering (UH Hilo, 2023).   Then Lieutenant Governor Green spearheaded the state's first publicly funded kauhale project, Kamaoku, as part of the first Ohana Zones initiative, and today has plans to create 12 more sites across the state.

Emergency Shelter: Homeless Outreach and Navigation for Unsheltered Persons

The most significant endorsement of HONU is that more than 50 percent of participants exit to shelters or housing, a pivotal breakthrough for serving unsheltered people. Such innovative interventions are critical, as unsheltered people are the largest segment of the homeless population (HUD, 2022–23). HONU is the only homeless shelter in the nation staffed by police, redefining law enforcement's role in social service and repositioning police as service partners.

A key reason people enter shelters is the need for personal safety, and the value of the 24/7 security and presence of Honolulu Police Department (HPD) officers at HONU cannot be overstated. This program allows for 24/7 intake and is also easier to access on foot and bicycle than many other shelter programs. In this familiar camp-like setting, participants experience the "circle of security" needed to recover from life on the streets (Circle of Security International, 2023). The trauma-informed site design can be augmented with trauma-informed programming for participants.

Leaders relay that extensive community outreach to community boards and local representatives ahead of the HONU setup is key to generating public support for the program. The temporary commitment required by host communities is unique and helped overcome NIMBY ("not in my backyard") syndrome. However, in practice, this short timeframe proves to be challenging and disruptive—just as operations

are established, it is time to shut down, even if the program is working well. It may be helpful for the City and County of Honolulu (C&CH) and HPD to explore shifting from a 90-day stay to a performance-based model and allowing HONU to remain until an encampment has been resolved.

This remarkable program is also vulnerable since innovation can be challenging to manage within government infrastructure. Over three years, administrative leadership has changed three times from C&CH, to HPD, and back to C&CH. After surviving these transitions, HONU may be superseded by new priorities like C.O.R.E. and Weed and Seed—the focus of new leaders. Such changes are a perfect storm for "model drift." While this makes it more difficult to replicate HONU across the state and to understand how it is working, the gap can be addressed by codifying the model with written protocols.

Family Shelter: Ulu Wini

Family shelters, like Ulu Wini, serve a critical need to address and include the needs of children in homeless services. This is critically important as, serving families with children is critical to preventing their homelessness as adults (Baker Collins, 2013). A critical next step in ensuring children's distinct needs are met is including children in official standards and data collection. The financial sustainability of Ulu Wini is made possible by Hawaii County funds, where the property management and programming budgets are included in one property management contract.

Process Evaluation

The strengths that helped Ohana Zones work well, challenges that hindered sustained success, opportunities for the future, and threats of progress are outlined below.

Strengths

- **Served many people who would otherwise not have received services through HUD.** HUD eligibility criteria, guidelines, priorities, regulations, funding, timelines, and approvals confine funding and resources. All Ohana Zones supportive housing projects have tenants that fall outside HUD eligibility criteria.

- **Allowed local leaders to reclaim local priorities to end homelessness.** Central coordination by the Governor's Office of Homelessness and eight state and county government divisions allowed local leaders to build alignment in their approach and generate greater collective impact.

- **Provided funding for services and housing, marking an important intersection between services and affordable housing development, which were previously recognized as separate initiatives.** This propelled continued efforts to co-mingle funding for "supportive housing," a combination of housing and services at one site.

- **Established a practice laboratory to promote efforts "to try something new"—unusual in the landscape of evidence-based funding requirements.** From this approach, three of the 18 initiatives garnered national attention: Family Assessment Center, HONU, and Kamaoku.

- **Fostered new partnerships and more cooperative funding across eight government jurisdictions.** All supportive housing project budgets required the co-mingling of multiple funding streams. For service providers, interdisciplinary teamwork expedited implementation.

- **Established a funding context for meaningful strategic planning.** Backed with Ohana Zones funds, the Kauai County Housing Agency created its inaugural strategic plan in 2020. The following year, Maui County built on the recently completed comprehensive housing plan with a new effort to create a complementary strategic plan addressing unsheltered homelessness.

- **Fewer restrictions allowed contracts to be modified during COVID-19 to address emerging needs and helped leaders proactively redirect funds.** This flexibility allowed funds to be repurposed for immediate needs rather than lapse.

- **Promoted innovative housing design**. Tiny home villages, like Kamaoku, have limited HUD funding opportunities. Unrestricted local dollars have the power to catalyze the development of innovative affordable housing.

Challenges

- **Time-limited funding caused programs to close.** Of 18 Ohana Zones programs, just two were closed due to underperformance. The programs with the greatest performance challenges had the shortest contracts (CQC, 2021). See Appendix (p. 27) for additional contract information.

- **Lack of an on-Island champion stalled implementation of evidence-based programming** (CQC, 2020). When diverse leaders join together to start a new project, it is helpful to have external implementation support to promote collaboration, shared decision making, and to overcome barriers. Without facilitation and support, disparate leadership and communication styles can impede implementation.

- **It is challenging for supportive housing projects to be self-sustaining, though there is interest in pursuing this goal** (J. Koshiba, personal communication, 2023). Including community assets and opportunities for social enterprise, with adequate start-up time and multi-year financial support, makes this vision more realistic.

- **Using separate databases to capture information about homelessness creates an inaccurate picture of progress.** There are at least nine separate, state-operated databases that hold information about homeless people in Hawaii (Collaborative Quality Consulting, 2019). This patchwork system generates a patchwork, and potentially inaccurate, representation of homelessness and efforts to address it.

Opportunities

- **Explore funding sources.** In addition to resources detailed by the OHHS Supportive Housing Work Group in 2022, several of Hawaii's rural communities qualify for USDA programs like: Multifamily Housing Program, Off-Farm Labor Housing Grants and Loans, On-Farm Labor Housing, Community Facilities Program, Denali Commission on High Energy Cost Grant, Telecom Program, Rural Development Broadband ReConnect, Solid Waste Management, and Business and Energy Programs.

- **Join together with private partners as one team of co-creators in affordable housing development.** Find a bridge between the government's identified need for units and private partner agendas through collaborative strategic planning. This includes expanding the pool of properties for consideration by including private landowners and embracing philanthropic agendas of the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Hawaii Community Foundation, and Kamehameha Schools, among others.

- **Consider leveraging Community Land Trust (CLT) to create affordable housing in perpetuity.** CLT is a non-profit organization that acquires or develops affordable housing—the organization takes land out of the speculative market and provides perpetually affordable housing in its place. Homeowners get a fair return on their investment upon resale, as they acquire the title to the home and receive exclusive use of the land (known as sustainable leasehold property). Presently, Hawaii has a CLT portfolio to build on, including: Na Hale O Maui (Maui), Housing and Land Enterprise (Hawaii), Hale O Hawaii (Hawaii), Hawaii Land Trust, Trust for Public Lands – Hawaiian Island Program, and North Shore Community Land Trust.

- **Explore workforce housing within the hospitality industry.** Hawaii has the highest-earning hospitality industry in the country. High revenues and an average vacancy rate of 20+ percent signal an opportunity to explore workforce housing possibilities (Fox, 2021).

- **Partner with local businesses for modular housing production.** This approach expedites construction and makes maintenance more efficient through a local supply of materials. HPM Building Supply, a locally owned construction supply company, is the first local producer of factory-built housing in the state. Their Hale Plus homes are fully permitted and built to code with smaller footprints (HPM Building Supply, 2023).

- **Tap into federal support by increasing access to personal benefits.** Social Security Insurance (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are entitlements for people with qualifying illnesses or disability and work histories (for SSDI). While many homeless people qualify for these benefits, very few receive them due to the difficult application process and missing vital documents. Investing in more legal support to help people overcome barriers and get vital documents yields greater opportunities to access housing and personal benefits. This shift helps transfer support costs from the state to the federal government and helps vulnerable people remain housed.

- **Upgrade government-owned buildings to solar power, and dedicate savings to capital development.** With the highest electricity rates in the United States, Hawaii pays substantially to keep the lights on at homeless shelters, offices, schools, libraries, and police stations statewide. Converting homeless shelters to solar power was previously explored (H. Brackeen, personal communication, 2022). While it is possible from an installation perspective, transitioning to solar power was previously rejected due to regulatory issues.

Threats

- **Downsized zoning drastically limits opportunities for (deeply) affordable housing development.** Extensive post-1980 zoning and permit regulations make it difficult to build homes on lots less than 5,000 square feet. (Callies, 2010).

- **The absence of legislative and regulatory decision-makers undermines strategic planning efforts.** Key influencers like legislators, legal counsel, attorney generals, corporate counsel, auditors, and financial offices are too often left out of strategic planning processes. This results in a lack of shared understanding of key issues, mutually agreed goals and barriers to their achievement. This bifurcation can undermine efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government functioning and creates potential roadblocks to implementation.

Final Recommendations

Years 2–4 of this evaluation included key recommendations, and remarkable progress has been made on the first two, as detailed throughout these reports:

- Increasing and stabilizing funding to address homelessness

- Investing in competency-based workforce development

- Administrative streamlining and upgrades to improve efficiency and effectiveness

- Alignment of strategic priorities and development of a comprehensive plan and funding

The following and final recommendations are offered to support work to end homelessness in Hawaii:

1. **Engage in cross-jurisdictional collaboration that includes legal (Attorney Generals, corporation counsel, etc.), legislators, finance, and auditors to achieve greater alignment to strategic goals with greater efficiency**. In the pursuit of optimal governance and efficient public administration, it is essential to recognize the interconnected nature of various governmental functions. Collaboration across jurisdictions, bringing together legal, financial, and auditing expertise, can pave the way for a more streamlined and synergistic approach to achieving strategic objectives, increasing efficiency, mitigating risk, and promoting government transparency. Without their participation to overcome obstacles, "obstacles along the path from street to home" will likely continue.

2. **Align individual legislative proposals with specific items within a comprehensive statewide long-term strategic plan.** Determine specific goals, metrics for achievement, and funding streams for support, and invite all stakeholders to sign onto the agreement. A commitment to such alignment ensures a unified and targeted approach for ending homelessness that extends across government administrations. Establishing specific, measurable goals and metrics, fostering accountability, and identifying clear funding streams to support evidence-based initiatives maximizes the state's effectiveness in combating homelessness.

3. **Generate unified action through coordinated communications that are organized by a central body and adapted for use throughout the state.** In addressing homelessness, a coordinated external communications plan is imperative for inspiring public action and garnering widespread support. A well-crafted communications strategy ensures a unified and consistent message, creating a shared understanding of the issue among diverse audiences. By engaging the public through various channels, the plan amplifies awareness, fostering empathy and encouraging a collective sense of responsibility. Ultimately, an effective external communications plan builds a bridge between policy makers, advocacy groups, and the public, catalyzing a collaborative effort to address homelessness with compassion and urgency.

Appendix

Table 1. Ohana Zones: People Served

Ohana Zones Totals: People Served 2019–23										
Type	Group	Project	Location	Lead Agency	Contractor	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Housing	Capital Development	Keolahou	Hawaii	County	HOPE Services	41	76	152	242	117
		Kealaula	Kauai	County	Women In Need		67	71	122	32
		Huliau	Maui	County	Hale Mahaolu and Family			46	55	56
		Kumuwai	Oahu	City and County	WORK Hawaii Division		66	126	187	91
		Hale Maluhia	Oahu	City and County	Domestic Violence					
		Kamaoku Kauhale	Oahu	City and County	Hui Aloha					
	Housing Vouchers	Vouchers: unsheltered	Oahu	City and County	Hawaii Health and Harm					
		Vouchers: youth	Oahu	City and County	Hale Kipa					
Services	Outreach	LEAD	Kauai	DOH	WIN	1	90	96		
		LEAD	Hawaii	DOH	Big Island Substance	9	72	72		
		LEAD	Maui	DOH	Mental Health Kokua		372	372		
	Emergency Shelter	Hale Hanakahi	Hawaii	County	HOPE Services		44			
		Ka Lamaku	Hawaii	County	HOPE Services		36		96	
		HONU	Oahu	City and County	Honolulu Police Dept.		1080	2327	2995	368
		RYSE Emergency shelter	Oahu	OYS	Residential Youth	107	238	336		
		Kukuiola	Hawaii Island	County						
		Uluwini	Hawaii Island	County	Hawaii Affordable		365	800	County	County
		Villages of Maili	Oahu	Catholic Charities of	Catholic Charities of	282	709	955		
Repairs		Kumuhonua	Oahu	HPO	HCAP					
		Onelauena	Oahu	HPO	Kealahou West Oahu					

Table 2. Ohana Zones: Contracts

Ohana Zones Services Contract Length					2018				2019				2020				2021				2022				2023				2024			
Name	Lead Agency	Managing Department	Contract in Years	Contract Dates	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
LEAD hawaii	Big Island Substance Abuse Council (BISAC)	DOH	1	2/12/19-2/11/20 (with option to extend)					■	■	■	■	■																			
LEAD Kauai	Women In Need (WIN)	DOH	1	2/12/19-2/11/20 (with option to extend)					■	■	■	■	■																			
LEAD Maui	Mental Health Kokua	DOH	1	2/12/19-2/11/20 (with option to extend)					■	■	■	■	■																			
Keolahou Assessment Center	Hawaii County	DHS	3	6/1/19-5/31/22						■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■										
Hale Hanakahi		DHS	4	6/15/19-6/14/23						■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■						
Ka Lamaku		DHS	5	6/15/19-6/14/24						■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Uluwini	Hawaii County	DHS	4	6/25/19-6/14/22						■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■										
Kukuiola		DHS	3							■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■										
HONU	City and County of Honolulu	DHS	3	5/22/19-5/21/22						■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■										
Villages of Ma'ili Assessment Center	Catholic Charities of Hawaii	DHS	2.5	11/1/18-6/30/21 (with option to extend)				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■														
Youth Access Center	RYSE	OYS	2.75	1/1/19-12/31/21					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■												

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