



ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

‘OHANA NUI STRONG



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The Department of Human Services provides important benefits and services that serve as building blocks for individuals and families in need to achieve self-sufficiency and success on their own terms. Our team is made up of nearly 2,400 positions across the islands. We provide these benefits and services with one of the largest state department budgets of \$3.6 billion, which includes the majority of the state government's federal monies. More than 80% of these funds are distributed as benefits or services.

OUR MISSION

We believe that all Hawai'i residents can and will thrive. We strive to reach this vision by fulfilling our mission to encourage self-sufficiency and support the well-being of individuals, families, and communities in Hawai'i.

► **The DHS 'Ohana**

The Director's Office, six Staff Offices, four Divisions, and seven Administratively Attached agencies comprise the Department of Human Services (DHS).

The Staff Offices serve the entire organization and include the Fiscal Management Office (FMO), the Office of Information Technology (OIT), the Human Resources (HR) Office, the Budget, Planning and Manage-

ment Office (BPMO), the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO), and the Audit, Quality Control and Research Office (AQCRO).

The four divisions of DHS are the Benefit, Employment and Support Services Division (BESSD), the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the Med-QUEST Division (MQD), and the Social Services

Division (SSD).

Administratively attached entities are the Hawai'i Public Housing Authority (HPHA), the Office of Youth Services (OYS), the Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women (HSCSW), the Commission on Fatherhood (COF), the Youth Commission and the Hawai'i Interagency Council on Homelessness (HICH).

Did you know?



We serve 1 in 3 of Hawai'i's residents

40%

More than 40% of kids are covered by Medicaid

Message from the Director

Since the beginning of the pandemic, DHS remained steadfast and committed to helping the people in our community. The department took aggressive and pre-emptive actions to protect the health and safety of its staff, and the individuals and families we serve in the safest way possible. DHS looks back on the actions we have taken to provide continued resources to keiki, their families, and individuals impacted by the health and economic consequences of the pandemic.

By utilizing technology to update service delivery systems and application processes, DHS was able to sustain essential benefits and services to support the people of Hawai'i.

Through it all, our dedicated administrators and staff have worked hard and remained flexible to adjust to numerous operational changes and ensure the success of new programs that came online to address the tremendous need in the community.

My team and I are committed to the continuum of care for those we serve guided by our top priorities: physical and mental well-being of children and families; employee self-care and resilience; and increasing equity.

While we continue to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic, we must be mindful of another type of condition that breeds hate and inequity, and the systemic racism and intolerance happening in our own country. For example, the insurrection of our nation's capitol.

While global protests of systemic racism took place after the murder of George Floyd, we have witnessed countless demonstrations across the world. These protests are a clear message to us that many have been awakened to this struggle.

In 2019, the Department of Human Services was invited to participate in scenario planning for 2035 with the Institute for Alternative Futures. We discussed progressive ideas to advance human services work—into work that provides a living wage, work that is dignified, and a plan to address the impacts of Statehood on the Native Hawaiian community through a truth and reconciliation commission process.

The exercise acknowledged the impacts that dispossession and removal from ancestral lands, the illegal overthrow, coupled with the impact of disease and the structural inequities of American style democracy resulted in untenable and generational consequences on Native Hawaiian communities.

From the work we do, we know intimately the effects that intergenerational trauma and toxic stress have on our families.



We know that racism, dispossession of land and dignity, and intergenerational poverty are part and parcel to the continuance of that trauma. We must continue to address that trauma in ourselves, in our families we serve, and in our community during this global pandemic.

Through our exploration of 'Ohana Nui, our multigenerational framework, we know that when we talk about the social determinants of health and well-being, we must recognize how systems, procedures, and old, siloed ways of "doing" have a real and disparate impact on communities of color.

Our DHS 'Ohana strives to uplift the welfare and well-being of the people of Hawai'i as a top priority. DHS will always promote the need to embrace and promote social justice and equity as well as access to essential services to ensure that all communities thrive.

Cathy

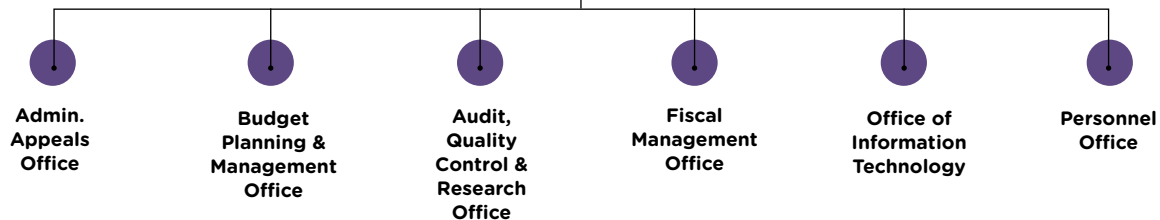
CATHY BETTS
DIRECTOR,
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

DHS Organization Chart

DHS DIRECTOR

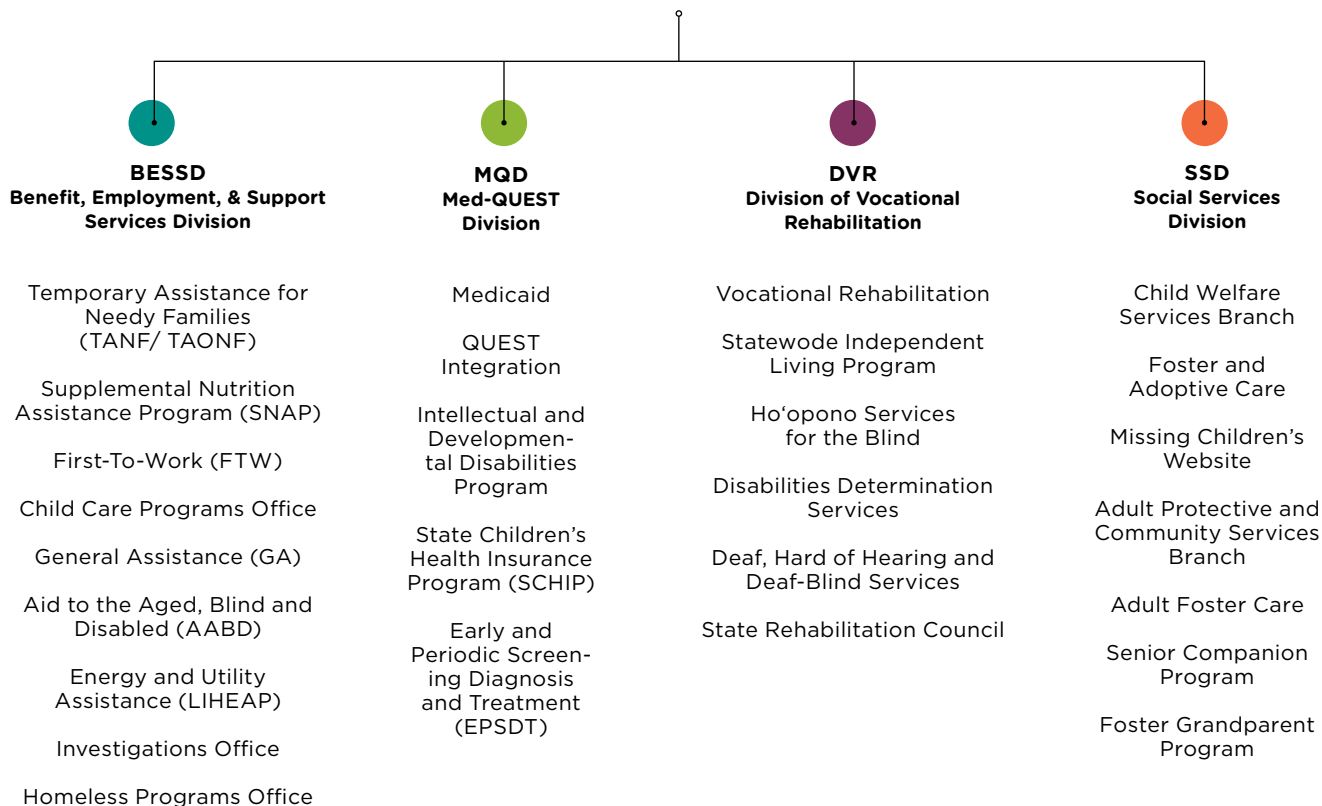
STAFF OFFICES

These staff offices provide essential administrative services so the department can run smoothly and our infrastructure is maintained and secured.



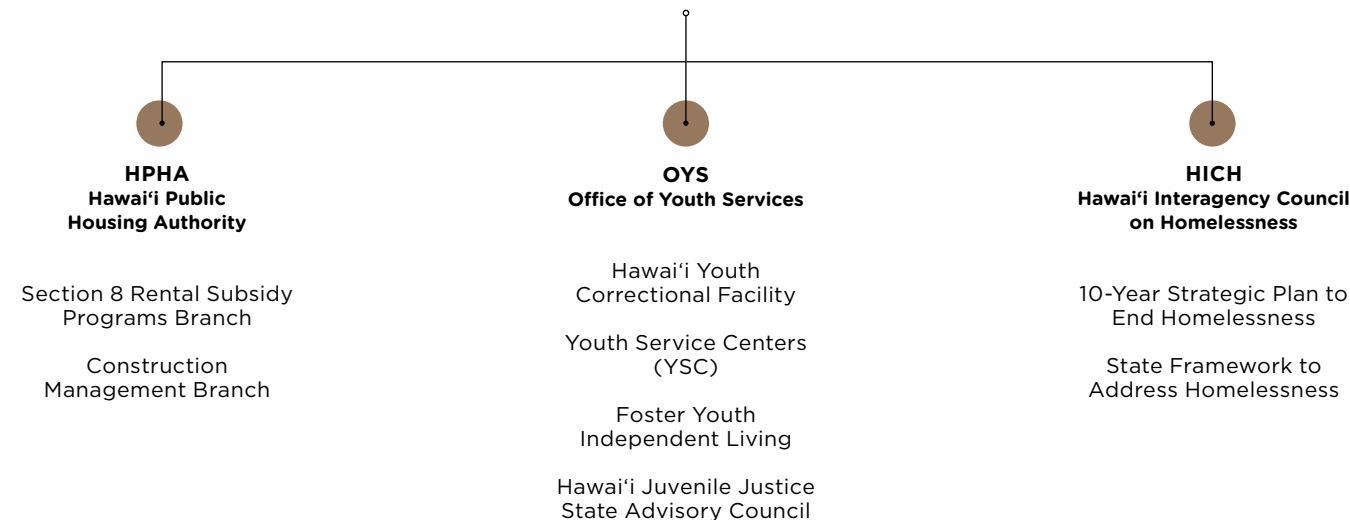
DHS DIVISIONS

These divisions deliver the core benefits and services to residents in need. Their work includes connecting individuals with nutrition and financial support, providing employment and job readiness supports, improving access to quality healthcare, protecting vulnerable adults and Hawai'i's keiki, and providing services and supports to individuals with disabilities to succeed as members of the workforce.



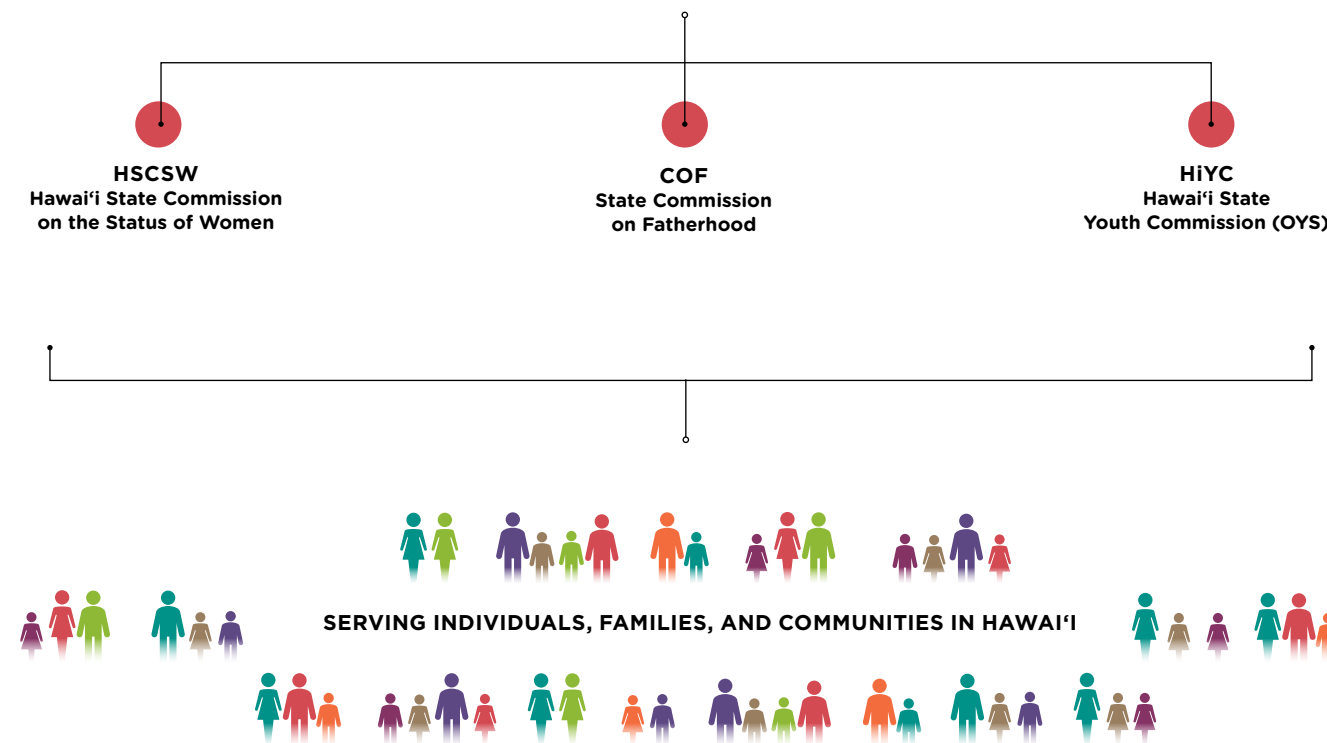
ATTACHED AGENCIES

Administratively attached to the Department Of Human Services, these independent agencies are linked to the department for purposes of reporting and sharing support services.



COMMISSIONS

Administratively attached to Department of Human Services, the commissions are independent bodies authorized by ordinance or statute to address critical community needs and engage citizens in service. It provides a means of influencing decisions that shape the quality of life for the residents of Hawai'i





'OHANA NUI STRONG

DHS leadership took quick, bold and creative action to ensure essential services remained steadfast to help and serve Hawai'i's most vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here's how DHS continued to provide vital services and maintained critical programs despite the challenges.



The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic were unprecedented and required bold and creative planning and execution to ensure all DHS essential services were provided in an uninterrupted but modified manner, while maintaining social distance and working remotely. Maintaining essential services and protecting the health and safety of the individuals and families were paramount.

Although there were limited face-to-face contact with the public to protect the health and safety of everyone, DHS staff ensured that processing times were as quick as possible and responded to the needs and questions of the community.

DHS took the following actions to ensure continuity of services:

COMMUNICATING RESOURCES AND UPDATES

A COVID-19 information resource page on the DHS website homepage was continually updated since March 9, 2020, to support community members, providers,

vendors and contractors. In addition, the Director has continually reached out to staff and the community at large to ensure that DHS services would continually be offered uninterrupted.

MED-QUEST DIVISION (MQD)

One of the greatest impacts of COVID-19 on the Med-QUEST program has been the dramatic and rising increase in the number of people covered. As individuals were laid off from work, they often lost their employer sponsored health insurance. Medicaid, as a safety-net program, began to see a huge uptick in applications

“Medicaid, as a safety-net program, began to see a huge uptick in applications for health insurance beginning in March 2020.”

for health insurance beginning in March 2020. The initial spike of new applications in March represented approximately an 80% increase in applications over the same time in 2019. Applications for Medicaid continued to surpass 2019 application volume statewide by 31% throughout 2020. As of mid-September 2021, Med-QUEST enrollments have increased by over 100,000 new members since March 2020, which represents a 31% increase.

The declaration of a Public Health Emergency (PHE) by former Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Azar and continuation of that declaration by current HHS Secretary Becerra, CMS has provided an increased federal matching rate (FMAP) of 6.2% to help cover the cost of insuring all Medicaid recipients. This additional FMAP was authorized by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and amended by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act that were both signed into law in March 2020. In order to qualify for this increased FMAP, however, MQD must not disenroll anyone who was covered or becomes covered from March 2020 until the end of the PHE. The only exception to this rule is if a member dies, moves out of state or requests to be terminated. This contributed to the sustained increase in enrollment numbers.

MQD understand there will be long-term economic impact for Hawai'i and

they anticipate that Medicaid membership will decline at the same rate that our economy grows. Much of what MQD has been able to accomplish to maintain support for members and providers is driven by the highly specialized and skilled staff at MQD. It will also be important that the enhanced FMAP continue for as long as possible in order to offset the unanticipated costs of health insurance coverage associated with the COVID-19 pandemic to the state. To date, the enhanced FMAP has already brought in over 100 million federal dollars. This funding is critical to Med-QUEST's ability to maintain the current programs that are so essential to the health and wellbeing of our community. The increased FMAP will no longer be provided after the end of the quarter in which the federal Department of Health and Human Services declared Public Health Emergency (PHE) officially comes to an end. This is likely to create financial strain as the state continues to support its programs without the additional federal bump in funding.

MQD's eligibility teams have already begun to design the significant work that will be required to unwind the many rules that have been in play during the PHE that allowed people to maintain Medicaid coverage during the pandemic. There will also be considerable effort in working with health plans and members to assess and address how care delivery can continue to support the wellbeing of our community with excellence.

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) AND FINANCIAL BENEFITS

The need for food assistance for Hawai'i's families dramatically increased due to COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, waivers were approved by the Food Nutrition Service (FNS) to streamline the SNAP application process to accommodate the spike in applications. An adjustment to the interview requirement allowed desk review for eligibility determination in lieu of conducting interviews. Furthermore, a continuing Resolution



signed by the President provided an option for States to elect to implement interview adjustments through June 30, 2021. An adjustment to certification and recertification also allowed for periodic and annual certification review periods due to expire to be pushed forward six months and through February 2021. Furthermore, a telephonic signature was accepted with an applicant's signature over the phone in lieu of requiring a wet signature on application. In June 2021, FNS provided States with the opportunity to request SNAP flexibilities for implementation until December 31, 2021, or the end of the month subsequent to the month in which

the public health emergency declaration related to COVID-19 is lifted by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, whichever comes first. The Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 (PL 116-159) (CR) included adjustments to the interview requirements such as offering a telephonic interview in lieu of face-to-face interview and accepting an applicant's signature over the phone in lieu of requiring a wet signature on application.

In March 2020, a request was submitted to FNS to provide to SNAP households emergency SNAP allotments that supplemented recipient households with

additional benefits so that they received a monthly amount equal to the maximum SNAP benefits for their household size. If the household already received the maximum amount for the month, then they would not receive the emergency allotment. The benefit started with the March benefit month. A new FNS guidance issued in April 2021 gave all SNAP recipient households a minimum supplement of \$95. Households whose calculated supplement were less than \$95, received \$95 and those whose calculated supplement was \$95 or more, received that benefit amount. In July 2021, the number of households

receiving benefits were 110,727 HHs, and the amount distributed was \$20,742,768..

In May 2020- Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) benefits to more than 93,000 school-aged children who were either certified to receive free or reduced priced meals or attended a Community Eligible Provision (CEP) school, were unable to access school meals due to the closure of their school for at least 5 days. The partnership with DOE included joint efforts in identifying low-income families to receive additional funds for food with the Pandemic-Electronic Benefit Transfer or P-EBT. The total bene-

fit amount was over \$33 million.

An additional round of P-EBT benefits were approved by FNS for the first 2 months (8/2020 and 9/2020) of the school year 2020-21. Congress and the President approved an additional round of P-EBT benefits that included the balance of the 2020-21 school year, increasing benefits that were issued in August and September 2020 by 15%, including children under the age of 6 who receive SNAP from October 2020 through the end of the 2020-21 school year, and provision of a summer P-EBT benefit. Additionally, there is also a clause that would make P-EBT available for the school year 2021-22 if a school

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WORKLOAD INCREASES DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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MED-QUEST

QUEST applications in April 2019

vs April 2020

April 2019 = 9,626

April 2020 = 13,425

Percentage increase = 40%

QUEST Enrollment in April 2019

vs April 2020

April 2019 = 331,742

April 2020 = 342,205

Percentage increase in Enrollment = 3.15%

Average time to process: 1-2 days average

SNAP/FINANCIAL APPLICATIONS:

Between March 23-April 16, 2020

Applications Received = 7,528

Applications Approved = 7,238

Average time to process: 2 days average

should close, or require reduced daily operation/access to students, for a period of 5 consecutive days due to COVID. And if P-EBT is issued for this reason in the school year 2021-22, summer P-EBT for 2022 would automatically become available to the affected students. The P-EBT benefits issued during this period were over \$210 million for approximately 120,000 families as of July 2020.

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) AND TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR OTHER NEEDY FAMILIES (TAONF)

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload increased 39% from 3,688 in March 2020 to 5,113 in August 2020, and the Temporary Assistance for Other Needy Families (TAONF) caseload increased 135% from 588 in March 2020 to 1,309 in August 2020. The surge in the caseload is a direct consequence of the sudden economic decline due to COVID-19. Prior to March, the TANF/TAONF caseload has been on a steady decline since 2012 due to the growth in Hawai'i's economy.

FIRST-TO-WORK (FTW)

The FTW units saw an increase in their caseloads, particularly units that service TAONF recipients. There was a 91% increase for TANF compared to a 145% increase in TAONF caseloads in the subsequent five months.

Participants were unable to receive in-person services, because the offices are closed to visitors. Case managers were unable to fully engage participants in the work program due to limited methods to service and communicate with participants. Furthermore, participation in work activities were limited, because non-profit organizations were temporarily closed, reduced their services, or weren't currently hiring. Participants were also unable to take advantage of available FTW supportive services such as childcare subsidies, transportation assistance (e.g., bus passes, mileage reimbursements, etc.), job placement services.



The requirement for TANF/TAONF applicants to fulfill one (1) week of upfront work participation with the FTW Program, within a 21-day period, was waived beginning with the GOV's Sixth Supplementary Proclamation which suspended HRS §346-261. This allowed the TANF/TAONF applicants to receive determination sooner.

Overall, the FTW Program experienced an increase in the number of participants. The average statewide FTW caseload in SFY 2020, pre-pandemic from 7/2019 to 3/2020, was 2,628. However, in five (5) months from 4/2020 to 8/2020, the monthly average was 4,296 which equates to a 63% increase.

GENERAL ASSISTANCE

Due to pandemic procedures, the GA caseload increased to the highest enrollment in over twenty years in the period May 2020 to May 2021. August 2020 (6,823). The only time the GA caseload exceeded 6,000 cases since January 2000 was in July 2012 (6,194) and September 2012 (6,017). The sustained increase in the caseload resulted in the reduction of the GA payment amount in March and April 2021 from \$388 to \$260 to maintain the financial viability of the program. The benefit amount was restored in May 2021 after the State Legislature and the Governor provided a \$3.2M emergency appropriation.

The presumed disability status pending the outcome of the disability evaluation allowed the GA applicant to receive benefits expeditiously provided they met the other GA program requirements. In SFY 2021 over 98% of GA applications were processed within the required time limit. The ability to reschedule evaluation appointments rather than denying the application has resulted in the increased caseload. The temporary waiver of sanctions for failing to comply with treatment requirements slowed the attrition of the caseload.

In addition to policy changes, the closure of the BESSD Processing Centers (PC) to the public resulted in operational adjustments that limited the effectiveness of communicating program eligibility requirements to clients due to the lack of

in-person contacts. For example, during the interview with GA clients, PC staff would explain the purpose and importance of keeping the GA disability evaluation and to receive treatment of their disabling condition in order to determine and maintain GA eligibility. After the closure of the PC, clients were informed of the GA evaluations and treatment requirements only through notices and telephone calls. During the period March 2020 to now, the percentage of clients who failed to keep a scheduled disability evaluation rose from 20% to over 50%, the percentage of clients who failed to comply with treatment exceeded 70%.

“Due to pandemic procedures, the GA caseload increased to the highest enrollment in over twenty years in the period May 2020 to May 2021.”

The GA caseload reached its peak in July 2020 and has been reducing steadily since due to a combination of dependent factors. The COVID-19 travel restrictions have limited the influx of potential GA clients from out of state, limiting the pool of potential GA applicants to unemployed or low income Hawai'i residents who claim to have a mental or physical condition that prevented them from working. The pool is reduced when disability evaluations determine the individual is not disabled. In addition, a higher percentage of individuals are failing to attend the required disability evaluation, so their applications are denied or their cases are closed. Thus, more individuals are exiting the program than are entering.

AID TO THE AGED, BLIND, AND DISABLED (AABD)

COVID-19 has had minimal impact on the AABD program as the program represents a segment of Hawai'i's population that cannot qualify for assistance from the Social Security Administration due to citizenship requirements. The caseload increased 12% from March 2020 (799) to August 2020 (893), without any gradual reduction in the caseload as with the other financial assistance programs. The increase in caseloads is due to fewer clients exiting the program during the end of SFY 2021 through current. The number of applications and approved cases during this period was less than the pre-pandemic period. This may be attributable to the COVID-19 travel restrictions that provided limitations on entering or leaving Hawai'i. Thus, no changes in policy or procedures were required for the AABD program.

However, the caseload for the Aid to the Aged portion is expected to increase as 98% of the AABD program consists of individuals over the age of 65 who cannot qualify for benefits for SSI. Over 60% of the individuals are citizens from a nation with a Compact of Free Association (COFA) agreement with the United States. When COVID travel restrictions are removed, more indigent COFA citizens over 65 years are estimated to migrate to Hawai'i for economic benefits and medical assistance that are not available in their home country.

LIHEAP

Requests for energy crisis assistance (ECI) have decreased due to disconnection moratoriums by the utility companies, which were extended through December 31, 2020. Customers who were proactive in seeking bill-pay assistance were being helped. However, LIHEAP have assisted approximately 150 Disaster ECI households to date.

A COVID Disaster Plan was created and enacted which allowed for desk reviews, telephonic signatures, verification deference for hardship households (ex. elderly with no internet or smart-



phone). Disaster ECI determinations were also tested at higher income limits and eligible for a larger benefit amount. Households needed to demonstrate a decrease of income due to COVID-19.

The number of applications approved for Energy Credits was approximately 7,670 and 1,231 ECI households were assisted. As the moratorium lifts in January 2021, LIHEAP anticipates an influx of applications for ECI assistance. They are working with local agencies to get volunteers to assist the Community Action Agencies with processing applications.

CHILD CARE CONNECTION HAWAI'I (CCCH)

The pandemic has caused a lack of adequate child care options for families with children at home, leaving parents unable to return to work or afford to pay the cost of child care with the shutdown of businesses and tourism. DHS has offered providers the opportunity to enter

into contracts for Emergency Child Care Services to enact additional health and safety measures for reducing the exposure to COVID-19. Income eligibility limits, activity requirements and family and copayment requirements for the Child Care Connection Hawai'i (CCCH) subsidy program have also been waived to assist families who have lost their jobs, been furloughed, or had a reduction in hours in their employment. The intention is for parents to have the ability to access child care, while searching to find new employment and support stability and continuity for the child.

Child care payment rates were also temporarily increased for July 2020 – June 2021 for families in the CCCH and the Preschool Open Doors child care subsidy programs to reduce family's out of pocket costs if providers had to increase their child care costs due to the additional health and safety measures.

Over 450 applications were received by July 31, 2020 for Emergency Child Care Services contracts from licensed

and registered and A+ services statewide. An increase of 2,000 applications were submitted for the CCCH child care subsidy assistance over the period July 2020 – June 2021, totalling 6,200 applications received. During April through June 2021, DHS issued over \$13 million for families that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and needed child care subsidy assistance.

The demand for child care subsidy assistance is expected to significantly increase. Preserving existing child care subsidy programs and capacity in the regulated child care facilities and homes statewide is critical.

SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION (SSD)

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was significant to the Division. Beginning in March 2020, precautionary safety measures were implemented, and delivery of services were modified to miti-

gate potential spread of the virus. Despite this public health concern, all SSD offices remained open and staff continued to work in the community to address concerns of abuse and/or neglect of our vulnerable adults and children.

Child Welfare Services (CWS)

The stay-at-home orders and social distancing requirements necessitated a change to daily operations with the practice of making assessments, and the way CWS partnered with other State Departments and community providers. Staff participated in various virtual meetings and training via Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, and WebEx with service providers, the Administration of Children and Families, and National Organizations to assist with providing continued service during the pandemic. How to identify child and abuse and neglect had to be addressed as the pandemic changed the environment for mandated reporters as well as what type of harm was being identified and reported. CWS has struggled with budget restrictions, vacancies and staff turnover. During the last year, CWS has made changes to protocols due to the pandemic impacts and continues to reassess these protocols that impact operations.

CWS intakes have been rising prior to the pandemic and besides a short period of time, in April 2020, the intakes have steadily risen to pre-pandemic level. CWS handles the most severe cases of children in impending danger, and during the last year, CWS has encountered many families in need and have used CARES funds to provide pre-paid cell phones to families to maintain contact and assist with services. They have also seen more children coming into care with complex needs with mental health, behavioral, medical, and cognitive needs that create challenges with placements.

Family court was temporarily closed due to COVID-19. All hearings for on-going dependency court hearings stopped during March and April 2020. About a year later, the court slowly resumed in-person hearings. However, with the positivity rate at its highest levels in August 2021, the courts started suspending many in-person hearings being replaced by virtual hearings. Collaborative meetings to address any issue regarding Chapter 587A Court

Proceeding as it relates to COVID were ongoing and the discussion on how to improve court proceedings between CWS and the Family Courts continued. Court hearings started up gradually for specialty courts, and other hearings through virtual and face-to-face which impacted permanency for children. Family Court implemented new policies and procedures and CWS adapted to those changes. The Judiciary allowed social workers to continue to appear at hearings virtually or by phone, which proved to be more time efficient than appearing in-person at court. The relationship between the Court and CWSB has improved as communications improved and more collaboration took place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

CWS aligned the new policy with federal regulations which autho-

rized virtual monthly visits during the pandemic. Parents raised concerns regarding virtual visitation between children and families ('Ohana Time Visits), impacting permanency efforts to reunify children with parents. Courts started ordering visits on certain cases. Alternative means of contact between children and families were allowed via FaceTime on cell phones, text messages, emails, social media, etc. to allow families to stay connected to one another.

Resource caregivers (RCGs) expressed the need for more general and financial assistance and support with providing daily care of children in foster care because of schools being closed, a decrease in employment (due to various businesses shutting down and unemployment), and the increased need of providing additional

needs for the children in their care. In April through June, funds were secured to provide RCGs with a one-time respite fund that assisted with the additional needs of providing care during the pandemic. Respite payments of \$500/child were processed within 2 weeks after the applications submitted in April-June 2020. As a result, RCGs felt supported during this stressful time, and CWS stabilized placement of children in foster care. All identified school-aged foster youth, who were in the DOE system, also received a P-EBT card through the mail. CARES Act funds were used to purchase laptops for foster youth and they also received donations of computer tablets from community partners.

Hawaii Foster Care Connections (HFCC) mobile app was developed and released on July 20, 2020.

In April 2020, the department temporarily revised the process of child-specific licensing applicants due to the Office of the Governor "Third Supplementary Proclamation" and previous two proclamations which started on March 4, 2020.

Adult Protective and Community Services (APCS)

Investigation of abuse and neglect to vulnerable adults continued during the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerns for the physical safety and well-being of vulnerable adults continued with the increase of isolation at home and in facilities. While some community partners ceased or dramatically scaled-back their operations, APCS's work continued. The scale-back has also increased intake reports being made by community partners who are unable to make face-to-face contacts with clients, increasing the APCS caseload.

Staff teleworked and inability to meet in-person resulted in the need to develop different ways to maintain continued support for various kupuna programs throughout the state. Services with the Senior Companion Program were suspended from March 17, 2020 - December 31, 2020 due to health and safety concerns for volunteers and clients. The Senior Companion program saw a loss of both volunteers and volunteer stations. AmeriCorps approved a temporary pay allowance for SCP volunteers from March 17, 2020 - December 31, 2020 which was

Live News



beneficial in retaining volunteers. On January 4, 2021, SCP resumed services. In May 2021, SCP partnered with the Elderly Affairs, Alu Like Foster Grandparents Program, Ke Ola Mamo, Kūpuna Power and Ombudsman Office to outreach seniors at Windward Mall. This outreach will happen every other month.

For the Foster Grandparent program (Kūpuna in the Classroom), all volunteers stopped serving in schools effective March 2020 and all in-person contact with volunteers (monthly meetings, training, school site visits) were suspended. Federal sponsor implemented a temporary stipend for volunteers who were not able to return to schools.

In January 2021, schools opened their campuses to students and a few more volunteers could return to classrooms. For the remainder of the 2021 school year, thirty-four percent of volunteers were actively serving in schools. FGP purchased twelve laptops to engage volunteers in virtual services with students. Volunteers were provided training and set up email accounts.

The APCS Staff on Kaua'i regularly reached out to clients by phone for wellness health checks and emotional support during the pandemic. Investigations and discharge planning meetings were conducted using technology for face-to-face contact when necessary for clients in long-term care facilities. Staff referred clients to Kūpuna Kare for fresh produce and Food Bank, Meals on Wheels deliveries, Agency of Elderly Affairs, and Kaua'i Economic Opportunity for goods and

services. They even donated PPE and cleaning supplies to clients who did not have supplies to keep their home safe from COVID-19.

For the vulnerable adults, APS anticipates seeing more financial exploitation and caregiver neglect, due to economic issues, stress, and other issues related to living in the time of COVID-19. For those kūpuna who are unvaccinated or are "breakthrough" cases, they continue to be at severe risk of the most negative consequences of the virus. Caseloads will likely rise, and cases are expected to be more complex, so they are preparing to address how to meet the need for increased investigations and services.

THE DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (DVR)

DVR staff responded to the Governor's emergency proclamation on March 5, 2020 to ensure staff, community providers, and participants were safe, while sustaining DVR service delivery. The pandemic impacted the way in which services were delivered, but it did not stop delivery of services. DVR eligible participants with an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that were supported with technology were able to learn and sustain services remotely. Other community resources were leveraged to support individuals without technology as needed.

With community partners, DVR hosted a staff training and networking platform from March-May 2020 to ensure



staff were aware of community resources to support service delivery for participants. This weekly networking continued to be hosted by UH Center for Disability Studies. Staff were given remote resource tools and instructions on use of remote platforms to sustain DVR's essential services in compliance with federal regulations. Supervisors created weekly tracking reports to monitor impacts of remote work and DVR services being sustained.

Blind and visually impaired consumers stayed connected and informed about access, resources, while learning new skills to support remote communications, and participants maintaining or obtaining competitive employment. Ho'opono Services for the Blind staff met as a large group monthly via Zoom to receive and share information, provide moral support, share resources, and receive COVID-19 preparedness and reopening updates, and created a Facebook video, which includes all staff reaching out to the community with reminders regarding health and safety during the pandemic.

DVR participants received UI benefits and were provided information on applying for other services (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, various county grants). DVR participants became engaged in using remote service platforms with contract providers and staff throughout March-July 2021 with staff training and supports. DVR developed 342 new Individual Plans for Employment, and assisted with 104 individuals who obtained employment. DVR held its first annual Virtual White Cane Walk via Facebook live and YouTube. They also organized a virtual mock interview platform with employers for DVR participants to practice their interviewing skills to prepare for employment in Hawaii's workforce.

HOMELESSNESS RELATED EFFORTS

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted homeless service providers, as well as individuals and families directly experiencing homelessness. For providers, the pandemic has posed significant health and safety risks for outreach and other direct service providers, as well as for emergency shel-

ter providers who manage congregate facilities with limited space for isolation and quarantine. For households directly experiencing homelessness, the pandemic made it more challenging to access services due to the reduction in bed spaces at shelters, as well as reduction in hours at some provider agencies. In addition, access to public parks and restroom shower facilities were significantly reduced, making it difficult for those experiencing homelessness to access basic hygiene services.

Overall, emergency shelter bed space statewide was reduced by an estimated 20% - with HPO funded emergency shelters reporting a reduction of 203 beds, from 979 beds pre-COVID to 776 beds available as of September 2020.

A key change to address the above impacts was the formation of the Behavioral Health and Homelessness Statewide Unified Response Group (BHHSURG), as well as regular coordination meetings with homeless outreach and shelter providers and funders of homeless services.

The BHHSURG is a partnership between HPO, the Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness (GCH) and the Department of Health (DOH) and provided a centralized website (<https://bhhsurg.hawaii.gov>) to share COVID-19 guidance, established community resilience hubs to collect and distribute Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for providers, and hosts weekly zoom webinars held every Monday on a variety of topics (e.g. telehealth, domestic violence, statewide rental assistance needs, unemployment, etc.). BHHSURG enables HPO, GCH, and DOH to provide information in one place for their mutual providers of behavioral health and homelessness services, and to support providers as the situation with the pandemic changes on a monthly, weekly or sometimes daily basis. In January 2021, BHHSURG webinars transitioned to a monthly basis and are now hosted on the GCH website (<https://homelessness.hawaii.gov/monthly-webinars>).

Beyond BHHSURG, partnerships and regular communication with other government agencies, homeless funders, and frontline service providers were key. During the early days of the pandemic, GCH worked with the Department of Land & Natural Resources (DLNR) to reopen

comfort stations at State parks and small boat harbor facilities to ensure access for homeless individuals needing basic hygiene. In addition, regular frontline provider meetings, as well as homeless funder meetings, enabled HPO and GCH to have strong connections with both frontline providers and other government and private funders. The close coordination enabled the homeless system to quickly respond if and when a crisis occurred. For example, when Institute of Human Services (IHS) experienced a COVID-19 cluster at its men's shelter, DOH quickly responded to convert the shelter to a temporary isolation and quarantine center and outreach providers quickly mobilized to canvass the areas around the shelter for potential positive cases within 24 hours.

The actions taken resulted in a very low number of COVID cases among the homeless population in the first five months of the pandemic, homeless providers having ready access to PPE, the continued delivery of critical homeless and behavioral health services, and homeless individuals continuing to be placed into permanent housing.

Between March and July 2020, there were only two known homeless individuals statewide who tested positive for COVID-19. The coordinated homeless systems response mitigated the number of cases among people experiencing homelessness.

The demand for homeless services is expected to significantly increase due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it will be critical to preserve existing homeless services as well as necessary staff positions to administer contracts and services during FY22 and beyond. It is critical to sustain both current funding and staffing levels to minimize adverse impacts of the pandemic on homelessness.

HAWAII PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY (HPHA)

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided direct and immediately available funding through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to the Hawaii Public Housing Authority (HPHA)



to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus (COVID-19), including to maintain normal operations and to take other necessary actions during the period impacted by coronavirus for the Federal Public Housing Program and the Federal Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Program.

HPHA took immediate measures to protect the agency's staff by purchasing and distributing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to staff on all islands as appropriate, including facial coverings, face shields, gloves, shoe coverings, cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer and more. HPHA also installed plexiglass barriers on desks and other high traffic areas and foot pulls on bathroom doors, turned on the hot water to promote proper hand washing, posted flyers to keep promoting good hygiene and physical distancing, purchased additional laptops and cell phones to support employees to work from home, closed offices to the public to prevent face-face interaction while remaining accessible by phone, email, or U.S. mail, implemented daily wipe down schedules of all personal works spaces and common areas, and coordinated with the Department of Health to provide training to all HPHA staff and private management agents on COVID-19.

HPHA Board of Directors passed and Governor Ige signed Hawaii Administrative Emergency Rules that set for the following requirements in all public hous-

ing properties until December 31, 2020.

These Hawaii Administrative Emergency Rules were urgently needed to provide financial relief to keep Section 8 program participants housed which helped to address the risk of the rapid spread of COVID-19 and to protect all the community, especially our elderly and disabled and those with underlying health conditions until December 31, 2020.

The HPHA Board of Directors adopted, and Governor David Y. Ige approved Hawaii Administrative Emergency Rules to allow for immediate interim rent adjustments due to loss of income, increased the payment standard, provide exemptions from late fees, and to select applicants through a lottery system for the Section 8 program.

The HPHA also established a new preference for families to "Lease in Place" and opened the Section 8 waitlist with a goal to provide 750 families with a Section 8 voucher. The HPHA held numerous "drive thru" events where eligible families could drop off their application documents to a Specialist who did an initial review and was successful in enrolling 838 families into the Section 8 program.

HPHA worked with the Hawaii State Department of Health Public Health Nurses and the Hawaii National Guard to conduct COVID-19 Outreach events at the agency's larger public housing properties.

At the request of the Hawaii State Emergency Management Agency

(HIEMA), HPHA administered the Aloha Cares Emergency Feeding Program (ACEFP). This emergency feeding program protected the public from the spread of COVID-19 by ensuring people affected by State and local COVID-19 stay at home orders and the homebound to receive meals and access to food (e.g., food boxes) as appropriate.

From July to October of 2020, the ACEFP served 4,023 people a total of 487,373 meals to the elderly, disabled and COVID-19 exposed participants. During the 4-month period, the HPHA was thankful for the privilege to serve all the participants through the ACEFP so that they could be safer at home during the COVID-19 pandemic and received numerous thank you cards. If called upon in the future, the HPHA stands ready to continue to assist our community.

OFFICE OF YOUTH SERVICES (OYS)

The impact thus far has reduced the availability of services to youth in all areas of OYS' focus, residential services, positive youth development, juvenile delinquency prevention and cultural programming. However, due to reduced arrest rates, there has also been a reduction in youth referred for diversion, residential services, and program services. Service providers have continually been operating and providing services in a safe manner to youth and families during the pandemic. However, the pandemic will continue to be challenging, as the intensity of maintaining safety protocols remains. The greatest long-term impact may likely be the lost relationships and engagement of youth and families, which is critical for reduction of juvenile delinquency and reducing recidivism. OYS continues to be mindful of the importance of collaboration with service providers to reduce these impacts.

OYS continued collaboration with service providers to discuss out of the box service delivery options to ensure youth in need receive services. OYS with the Department of Health (DOH)-Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division (ADAD) & Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division (CAMHD) continued to maintain a non-medical shelter quarantine at

the Kawaiiloa Youth and Family Wellness Center on the Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility (HYCF) campus, for youth who may have been exposed to COVID. They also continued collaboration with the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to maintain buildings and lease permits with RYSE to operate its homeless shelter and other non-profit entities.

Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility (HYCF)

HYCF increased the utilization of technology to provide access to HYCF youth and for youth to receive programming and focused on sustaining a COVID free living environment for the youth of HYCF. Social distancing rules were established to allow one-on-one treatment along with mandatory staff vaccinations and required weekly testing. Social distancing, temperature checks, and mandatory mask wearing were implemented. In addition, dry fog sanitation of transport fleet, work

and living environments as well as ensuring the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) and disinfectant supplies were implemented.

The establishment of effective partnerships, early coordination of representatives from all aspects of the juvenile justice system, limited access to the correctional environment, a reduced youth secure population and strict isolation of all newly incarcerated youth have all contributed to maintaining this COVID-free status despite other correctional settings with similar risk profiles. This partnership has been able to mount an effective, sustainable, and integrated response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

HAWAI'I STATE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (HSCSW)

The pandemic has led to the increased economic insecurity for women as they

experienced the majority of COVID-19 related job losses in Hawai'i, nationally, and globally. The disproportionate loss of work hours and job loss for women due to caregiving, daycare and school closures has only increased the mental and physical health strains leading to an increased need for coordination, collaboration, and resources to address the disproportionate toll of COVID-19 on women. HSCSW was instrumental in leading these efforts.

HSCSW served as liaison for women workers in public and private sector to address child care crisis, and hosted as a speaker in approximately 50 online webinars on gender responsive crisis management in workplace policies, taxes, benefits, and other issues, including a three week-long series in partnership with WaiWai Collective.

HSCSW recognized women in the sex trade as a vulnerable group during COVID-19. They coordinated delivery of rental assistance, clothing, cell phones, medica-

tion to women in the sex trade and survivors with community organizers, such as AF3IRM.

HSCSW continued to meet with the Housing Task Force via virtual platforms and monitored related bills/resolutions related to evictions and tax credits as well as submitted testimony in support. Due to HSCSW efforts, U.S. AG formerly mandated sexual exploitation of tenants by landlords as a top priority for the Department of Justice (DOJ) during the pandemic, thus creating opportunities for more victims to come forward. Federal agencies, such as DOJ and HUD, contacted HSCSW with appreciation.

HSCSW raised \$250,000 in private funding to address tech inequality and gender with over 250 laptops to single mothers, Micronesian and Pacific Island women and children. This provided over 250 laptops to single moms and their children to address the new telework and distance learning requirements.

HSCSW provided critical consulting on gender responsive pandemic planning and recovery at over 50 virtual events, published qualitative data to capture the gender impact of COVID-19. Single Mom Tech program was created from HSCSW's "Survey of Single Moms" in Hawai'i to address benefits and assistance needed during the pandemic;

HSCSW introduced and passed

HCR11 Missing and Murdered Native Hawaiian Women and Girls' Taskforce.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY/ INTERNAL SYSTEMS/ VIRTUAL DESKTOP INFRASTRUCTURE

Due to the statewide budget and hiring freezes, the IT staffing kept a record low— with seventeen vacant positions. Furthermore, many key leadership, IT and project resources retired during the pandemic. The sudden shift to work-from-home, statewide stay-at-home orders and office closures exposed significant inefficiencies in government business processes and other major IT challenges that have long-existed. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IT support that was needed was tremendous and nonstop. IT needed to provide clients with DHS essential services, enable staff to telework, and secure the network. DHS quickly identified solutions for employees to work from home, practice social distancing, while complying with public health guidelines. IT invested in technology to ensure the reliability and availability of their systems, so the business units can process applications and distribute benefits timely, and improve telework capabilities.

IT configured, tested and deployed

a virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) in Google Cloud, enabling 1000 remote sessions to DHS applications and data between March 23 and April 7, 2020. The average daily user count accessing DHS systems through VDI has been 400-450 during the pandemic. DHS IT continued to enhance and make improvements to both VPN and VDI capabilities to achieve the goal of having 50-75% mobile workforce.

Over 500 laptops and Work-From-Home Kits were deployed between March and July 2020. By the end of December 2020, DHS deployed 300 more laptops.

DHS also worked with Hawaiian Telcom to create two telephone service offerings, allowing employees to make and receive business calls remotely, using any device over the internet.

The Director's office converted the food/financial (SNAP/TANF) paper application to a fillable PDF in April to enable a semi-electronic application process. Starting in May 2020, IT and BESSD worked with a technology partner to develop an online portal to accept applications for food and financial support. After the system went live on June 8th, over 35,000 applications have been received. Within 30 days of going live, over 50% of all SNAP/TANF applications were received online.



TEAM-ORIENTED	HUMAN-CENTERED	RESPECTFUL	INTENTIONAL	VISIONARY	EVIDENCE-BASED
We acknowledge that internal and external partnerships are critical to the success of DHS.	We develop strategies and make improvements as necessary from the client's perspective.	We recognize the inherent value of each person as well as the diverse cultures of Hawai'i.	We are mindful of our decisions and actions in our collective work.	We strive to support our clients by co-creating innovative and forward-looking strategies.	We make decisions that are based on data and take actions that aim for sustainable outcomes.

BESSD

Every month, the Benefit, Employment, and Support Services Division (BESSD) provides public assistance benefits to nearly 1 in 8 individuals statewide. These benefits provide for basic daily necessities for individuals – keiki to kūpuna – and families.



SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

One of Six States to Receive Grant to Combat Childhood Hunger

S **HARE OUR STRENGTH'S** No Kid Hungry campaign invested nearly \$2 million in six states to advance SNAP agency innovation and inter-agency coordination to combat childhood hunger. Hawai'i was one of the six states to receive the grant along with Kansas, North Carolina, Michigan, New Jersey and New Mexico. Each project was carried out over an 18-month grant period with support from the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA).

Federal nutrition programs are critical anti-poverty measures, and the state and local agencies that administer them play an essential role ensuring families can access these supports, getting their children the nutrition they need both at home and where they learn so they can grow up to be healthy and strong.

Hawai'i and the other selected agencies participated in cohort learning, sharing best practices and opportunities for policy and practice changes that reduce childhood hunger. No Kid Hungry and APHSA worked with a national advisory committee that guided planning and provided technical assistance throughout the project. The advi-

sory committee provided expertise to grantees and is composed of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), Code for America, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and their Community Partnership Group, and the Syracuse University Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

"This strategic partnership with the No Kid Hungry campaign reflects exactly the kind of boundary spanning systems alignment work that health and human services agencies seek to advance," said Matt Lyons, Director of Policy and Research at APHSA. He also added that the investments made through these grants help agencies build modern platforms that remove systemic barriers for families to access the nutrition supports they need to thrive.

Led by the DHS, this project aimed to build foundational capacity to analyze administrative data across nutrition programs—specifically SNAP and WIC—with support from both the Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) and the Children's Healthy Living Center of Excellence (CHL Center) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. From the onset, the goals were to understand trends in co-enrollment, identify characteristics of individuals and communities that are vulnerable or have low rates of enrollment in eligible programs, and guide program and policy planning. This initiative also aimed to streamline policy, programs, and resources that impact the lives of children and their families. Enhancing interagency collaboration, improving eligibility workers' knowledge of SNAP and WIC, allowing DHS and DOH to match participant data, and increasing the number and percentage of children and families coenrolled in SNAP and WIC were equally important. Funding was used to hire a project manager, develop interagency data governance agreements, and contract with the CHL Center for technical assistance regarding data integration for future nutrition program analytics. Rooted in Hawai'i's existing 'Ohana Nui framework, DHS sought to dismantle intergenerational poverty by collaboratively working with government agencies and community organizations to address the needs of multigenerational households.

PANDEMIC ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER

THREE ROUNDS OF P-EBT BENEFITS FOR HAWAI‘I’S FAMILIES

Families with children who received free or reduced-cost school meals were provided temporary pandemic food purchasing assistance.

DUE TO THE IMPACT of school closures during COVID-19, families who qualified for free or reduced-price school meals were eligible to receive temporary food purchasing assistance through The Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program. This program is part of a food assistance plan approved by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, and authorized by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.

Hawai‘i received three rounds of this temporary assistance program, providing Hawai‘i P-EBT Pandemic School Meals Replacement Benefits to more than 93,000 students (Kindergarten – 12th Grade) receiving free or reduced-price school meals in Hawai‘i with \$33,437,250 in food assistance support.

Children who were enrolled in a school that provides free meals to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or another provision were also eligible.

P-EBT benefits were automatically deposited to their existing Kokua EBT

card. The P-EBT benefits could be used the same way as their Kokua EBT card and the Da Bux program.

“Ensuring that children in need have access to nutritious meals remains a top priority,” shared Cathy Betts, Director of the Department of Human Services. “As families navigate the challenges of work, remote learning, and caring for their ‘ohana, we hope these additional benefits will relieve some of the financial stressors of accessing healthy and nutritious meals.”

“Ensuring that children in need have access to nutritious meals remains a top priority.”

Superintendent Dr. Christina Kishimoto adds, “Many students rely on school meals as their primary source of daily intake. With the majority of students participating in distance learning during the first quarter, it’s important to make sure that families have the resources they need to provide well-balanced and nutritious meals to their children so that they can continue to learn and thrive.”



Providing Food Support Through Keiki under 6 Program

► **THE KEIKI UNDER 6** Food Support Program benefits children under the age of 6 years old who have received SNAP benefits at any time since October 1, 2020. Benefits were paid for each month the eligible child received SNAP benefits between October 2020 through May 2021.

There was no application for the Keiki Under 6 Food Support Program. Eligible children were automatically enrolled for this program through verification of SNAP participation with the Department’s eligibility system.

Benefits could be used to purchase SNAP-eligible foods, such as groceries (including frozen items), snacks, and seeds or plants that produce food. The Kokua EBT cards could also be used in the Da Bux program.

The following were the maximum amounts that a child could receive that cover the period of October 2020 through May 2021:

- Hawai‘i Island, Lāna‘i and Maui: \$1,144
- O‘ahu: \$1,002
- Kaua‘i and Moloka‘i: \$931*

Variations in benefit amounts were based on the learning models (100% distance, hybrid, or in-person) that were used on each island throughout the benefit period.

CONTINUAL RISE OF SNAP APPLICATIONS

AN EXPONENTIAL INCREASE of individuals and households in need of safety net services due to COVID-19 continued to rise, and DHS keeps pace with applications.

In February 2020, the Department anticipated that the pandemic would heavily impact vulnerable populations, to include those who would lose their jobs and have their livelihoods threatened. DHS took aggressive and proactive measures to provide food and financial assistance for those they serve. They transitioned from providing a paper SNAP/Financial application prior to COVID-19, to an online application that has helped increase client access and ensure timeliness of benefit issuance.

Since March 2020, the SNAP Emergency Supplements have helped more than 60,000 households with more than \$56 million for individuals and families in need.

In April 2021, SNAP replacement benefits were extended due to the recent flooding and landslides experienced in some districts. This replaced food purchased with SNAP benefits that was destroyed in a household misfortune like the flooding and landslides that occurred in March throughout the state.

PANDEMIC ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER

State warns of text scam about P-EBT Benefits

AFTER RECEIVING REPORTS of a text scam for obtaining personal information, DHS sent out a warning to SNAP recipients and the general public. The text fraudulently claims to be from the Hawai‘i Department of Human Services and provides a number to call about P-EBT (Pandemic – Electronic Benefit Transfer).

The department warns the public to delete the text, and never share personal information with individuals or organizations that are unfamiliar. Personal information includes a social security number, bank information, SNAP electronic benefits transfer card, or PIN number. As a reminder, DHS does not send out text messages about P-EBT, SNAP, EBT, or Financial benefits.

DHS has received multiple reports from SNAP recipients as well as non-SNAP recipients. DHS wants the public to be aware and prevent anyone from falling victim to the scam. Those that were unsure if a request for information was legitimate, was advised to contact the Statewide Branch Support Desk toll-free line at 1-855-643-1643.



Walmart EBT Food Purchasing in Hawai‘i

► **IN SEPTEMBER 2020**, Hawai‘i Walmart stores received approval for the Online Express Grocery Program for Hawai‘i’s SNAP recipients. Approval was made from the Food and Nutrition Service under the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This critical program enabled kūpuna and those with pre-existing health conditions the safe option to pick up their groceries curbside at no cost. SNAP recipients could also utilize the home delivery option for a fee. No minimum purchase amount designated to utilize the curbside pickup for those using their EBT card.



allenges with lead contamination as we have seen in the continental United States, so it's important to note this project is a precautionary measure," said State Toxicologist Dr. Diana Felton. "Historically, public water systems in Hawai'i have not had lead contamination. However, it is possible for lead to contaminate drinking water through fixtures and piping within a school or child care facility, particularly in older buildings, so we want to make sure keiki are safe."

Lead exposure can harm the brain and nervous system. Long-term childhood lead exposure can result in problems with learning, school performance, attention, and behavior as well as anemia and other health problems.

The samples were tested by the health department's State Laboratories Division.

Site investigations were conducted at 295 elementary schools and childcare facilities statewide. 69 facilities were identified as having no sources to be included in the testing phase as they either provided only bottled water or utilized a point-of-use filter that was attached to the fixture. Two childcare facilities closed permanently before samples were collected and one child care facility did not allow for collected samples due to medical issues related to COVID-19. In total, 223 facilities were sampled as part of the sample collection.

Between the months of May 2021 and October 2021, 6,210 250ml first draw samples from 223 facilities located on the islands of O'ahu, Hawai'i, Maui, Kauai, Moloka'i and Lāna'i.

Schools and child care facilities were selected for the tests based on the age of the buildings, the children who are served at the schools, whether they have had their drinking water tested in the past, and other factors. For a list of schools and child care facilities that were tested, visit <https://health.hawaii.gov/wiin>.

Immediate corrective actions, such as blocking off access to the source and the usage of filters were communicated to each facility with one or more water sources with initial sample results above 15 ppb. During follow-up sampling, TruPani ensured that sources with exceedances had appropriate signage. Long term corrective actions for impacted water sources are determined by the individual school, child-care facility, or HDOE.

CHILD CARE PROGRAMS OFFICE

Drinking water at selected Hawai'i public schools tested for Lead

TO ENSURE THE WATER AT HAWAI'I'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS and child care facilities is safe to drink, the Hawai'i State Department of Education (HIDOE), Department of Health (DOH), and Department of Human Services (DHS) launched a joint project to test tap water at selected schools and child care facilities for the presence of lead from February through December 2021.

The project was part of a nationwide program established under the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act of 2017 to test drinking water for lead in schools and child care centers. The Hawai'i project was paid for by a \$222,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The State of Hawai'i's contribution to the project was an additional \$696,000 from the technical assistance set-aside portion of the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund.

"Hawai'i has been fortunate in that we have not experienced the same types of chal-

CHILD CARE PROGRAMS OFFICE

CHILD CARE STIMULUS GRANT PROGRAM

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020 provided funding to stabilize the child care sector.

HAWAI'I COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (HCF) partnered with DHS to distribute over 11 million dollars in federal funds through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020 to support the reopening and continuous operation of licensed child-care programs across the state.

The goal of the Child Care Stimulus Grant Program was to provide regulated child care providers or A+ providers with one-time, flexible funding to ensure the continuity of their programs, prevent permanent closure and/or support child care providers to re-open their operations safely with financial resources. It also

sought to ensure that child care facilities were able to meet the additional health and safety measures set by DHS to reduce exposure to COVID-19 among children, families and staff.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, DHS recognized that child care must be part of every conversation addressing essential workers and remains a critical part of reopening and supporting the local economy. DHS Director Cathy Betts adds, "Child care providers are vital in giving children healthy and safe environments that promote early development while offering parents peace of mind during this extraordinarily challenging time." DHS continued to do everything within their means to support child care providers continued operation and success.



Any licensed or regulated child care provider, including family child care homes, group child care homes, group child care centers, infant and toddler centers, or before/after school programs, or A+ providers in Hawai'i were eligible to apply. Allowable expenses included utility payments, rent/mortgage payments, staff salaries, cleaning supplies, personal protective gear and other supplies needed to care for children. Almost 300 child care facilities participated in this program from across the state.

'Ohana Reader's Program

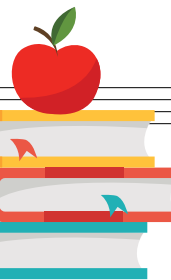
CULTIVATING A LOVE OF READING at an early age can set keiki up for success later in life. On Lāna'i, children under 5 years old who registered received a free, high-quality, age-appropriate book every month as part of the Imagination Library Pilot Project.

Led by First Lady Dawn Amano-Ige, 'Ohana Readers and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library teamed up late 2019 to launch 'Ohana Readers on Moloka'i. After initial success, the team expanded the program to Lana'i in 2020 and Kaua'i in 2021.

Peggy Fink, branch manager at Lanai Public and School Library said, "This excel-

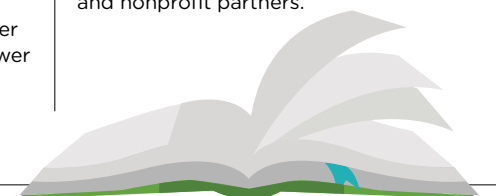
lent program encourages early literacy at home, giving parents and their keiki quality time to explore books and develop a love of reading." Amano-Ige adds, "'Ohana Readers encourages family read-aloud time, an activity that increases the vocabulary and language skills of our children and contributes to their growing knowledge of the world."

Dolly Parton Imagination Library was launched in 1995 to serve kids in her home county of East Tennessee to foster an early love of reading. Dolly Parton's father couldn't read, so she recognized the power of literacy at an early age. The program began providing children with free,



age-appropriate books each month. Today, over 1.5 million children across the world have registered to participate.

'Ohana Readers is designated as an affiliate of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library and a collaborative partnership with the Dollywood Foundation, the Office of the Governor, the State Department of Human Services, the Hawai'i State Public Library System, State Representative Lynn DeCoite, Friends of the Library of Hawai'i and nonprofit partners.



MQD

Med-QUEST (Quality, Universal Access, Efficiency, Sustainability, Transformation) is a division of Hawai'i's Department of Human Services. Our team of approximately 300 employees are located at sites across the state serving every island.

MED-QUEST

TELEHEALTH GUIDANCE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

MQD continued to look at how they can best meet the needs of Hawai'i's providers and Medicaid beneficiaries while ensuring quality care during COVID-19.

THE MED-QUEST DIVISION (MQD) received numerous inquiries regarding the provision of medical services using telehealth especially related to services provided during the Public Health Emergency (PHE) for the COVID-19 pandemic. The Division continued to provide guidance as needed given the changing dynamics of the PHE. MQD continued to look at how they could be more flexible to meet the needs of Hawai'i's providers and Medicaid beneficiaries while ensuring quality care.

"Tele-health" means the use of telecommunication services to transmit patient health information for interpre-

tation and diagnosis while a patient is at an originating site and the health care providers is at a distant site. It is an enabling technology intended to facilitate access for patients who would otherwise not receive services without the provider being physically present.

In keeping with CMS guidelines, MQD allowed telephonic (audio-only) "visits", in addition to other telehealth modalities, to provide medically necessary health care services (e.g., medical, behavioral health, substance abuse disorders, occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), speech therapy (ST)] during the PHE period. In alignment with CMS guidelines, these were retroactive to March 1, 2020. MQD provided codes with conditions to

receive PPS reimbursements.

Medicaid services that were provided through tele-health must be for services that are approved within the scope of the specific FQHC's PPS reimbursement rate.

MQD allowed telephonic visits following Medicare guidelines. However, in delivering services via telephone, all providers needed to meet the specified qualifications to perform the services, as well as any other state-established criteria for furnishing services through tele-health delivery methods.

In addition to traditional tele-health modalities (synchronous, audio-visual and asynchronous), MQD understands the extraordinary circumstances we are all under in which traditional modalities of audio and visual do not apply.

Special Enrollment Period for COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

HAWAII RESIDENTS were encouraged to visit HealthCare.gov, following President Biden's Executive Order that provides a Special Enrollment Period (SEP) for Health Insurance Marketplace coverage from February 15, 2021 through May 15, 2021. An extension for coverage was announced in April for coverage until August 15. HealthCare.gov made SEP available in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. "Residents who need affordable health insurance and who do not qualify for Medicaid cov-

erage should visit the Marketplace website to apply and enroll in a plan," shared Department of Human Services Director, Cathy Betts. "The federal marketplace enrollment system is linked to Hawai'i's Medicaid enrollment system. This enables applicants to find affordable health insurance, and if they are likely to be Medicaid eligible, Marketplace applications will automatically be referred to Medicaid for coverage."

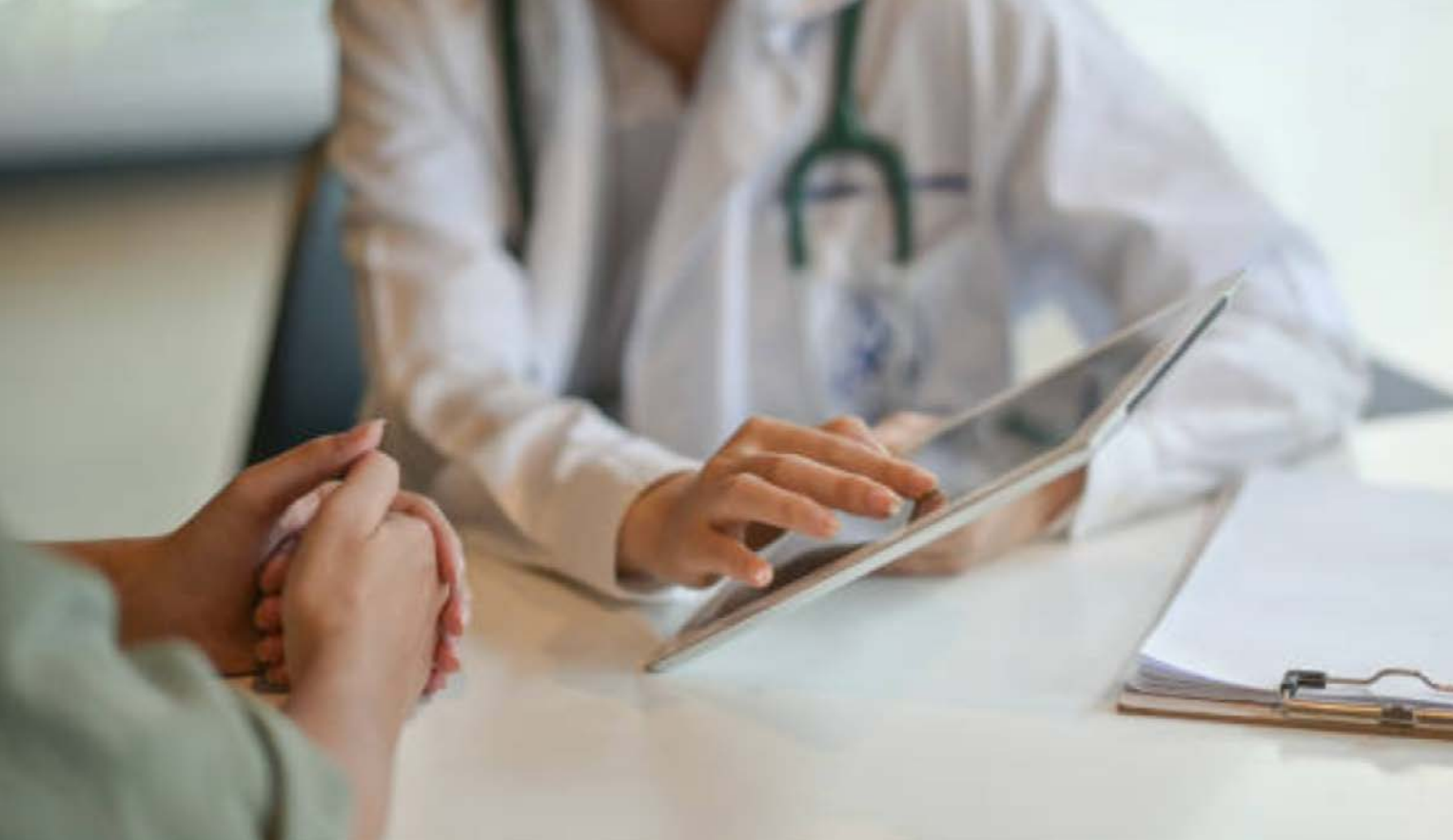
Individuals and families received more time to access the SEP and enroll in

Marketplace coverage with the increased tax credits to reduce their premiums. Current enrollees who wished to change plans in response to the availability of increased tax credits could submit an application update on or after April 1 to receive an updated eligibility determination.

Consumers saved, on average, \$50 per person per month and \$85 per policy per month. About one out of four enrollees on HealthCare.gov was able to upgrade to a higher plan category that offered bet-

ter out of pocket costs at the same or lower premium compared to what they were paying.

This SEP opportunity did not involve any new application questions or require consumers to provide any new information not otherwise required to determine eligibility and enroll in coverage. In addition, residents did not need to provide any documentation of a qualifying event (e.g., loss of a job or birth of a child), which is typically required for SEP eligibility.



MED-QUEST PROVIDES OPTIONS FOR UNEMPLOYED HAWAI‘I RESIDENTS IN NEED OF COVERAGE

Due to Hawai‘i’s high unemployment rate and continued layoffs, Med-QUEST sent out a reminder of coverage options to the community.

EARLY 390,000 Hawai‘i residents —about one in four statewide — are Medicaid beneficiaries. About 63,000 of those were new Medicaid beneficiaries since the pandemic began. This represented a 19% increase in statewide enrollment from a year ago. The increase was most pronounced in Maui county and Kaua‘i county, where the increases were up nearly 21% and 19%, respectively, over the same time last year.

With the state’s high unemployment rate and businesses continuing to layoff their employees, the Med-QUEST Division of the Department of Human Services, anticipated the increase in the number of those who need health insurance coverage.

Judy Mohr Peterson, administrator of the Med-QUEST Division of the Hawai‘i

Department of Human Services shared that they have invested in technology over the years to make process improvements a smoother, streamlined enrollment experience for applicants. She says, “Those changes have proven to be valuable during these challenging times to process a high volume of applications. We are encouraging those who have lost their job and do not currently have health insurance to apply and enroll as soon as possible.”

A chart was shared that provided income guidelines to applicants to determine if they should apply for federally subsidized health insurance from the federal marketplace at HealthCare.gov or no-cost coverage from the Med-QUEST Division at Medical.mybenefits.hawaii.gov.

The federal marketplace enrollment system is linked to Hawai‘i’s Medicaid enrollment system. This enables applicants

to find affordable health insurance, and if they were eligible, will automatically be referred to Medicaid for no-cost coverage. In Hawai‘i, the Med-QUEST Division provides education, outreach and enrollment assistance for the marketplace and partners with community organizations statewide to help with this effort.

Healthcare.Gov also announced a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) special enrollment period for those who have lost health insurance coverage. It could be applied to anyone who lost employer sponsored coverage since January, 2020 due to the COVID pandemic.

Hawai‘i residents who have experienced life changes other than job loss such as having a baby or moving could have also qualified for the FEMA special enrollment period if their life was affected in some way by COVID-19.



MEDICAL COVERAGE UPON PRISON RELEASE

MANY LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS with severe mental illness leave the state institutions without health insurance and without financial access to the treatment they need to live successfully in their communities. Many of these individuals might be eligible for Medicaid coverage on the basis of their disability or other factors. However, complex eligibility rules for Federal disability benefits and Medicaid as well as complicated application procedures create some barriers to ensuring that these individuals have Medicaid coverage after they leave an institution.

Med-QUEST’s Health Care Outreach Branch is working with the Department of Public Safety’s Re-Entry Coordination Department, the Medical Unit, Maui Re-Entry Hui, Kauai Community Correctional Center’s Mental Health Section, Mohala Wahine (Women’s Specialty Court) along with Specialty Drug Court to ensure we are helping transitioning residents leaving incarceration with obtaining health coverage. Additionally, they work with the Social Work Services Department at Hawai‘i State Hospital (HSH) daily to ensure suspended coverage for patients who are being admitted to HSH. When these patients are being discharged from HSH they work with the social workers to complete required documents so they can connect them to health coverage upon their discharge.

SUBHEAD HERE TKTK

Hawai‘i ‘Ohana Nui Project Expansion (HOPE)

MED-QUEST CONTINUED focusing on its Hawai‘i ‘Ohana Nui Project Expansion (HOPE) vision to support and create healthy families and healthy communities by providing innovative programs over the full continuum of care, from physical and behavioral health, to long term services and supports. Committed to laying the foundation for innovative programs and models that support and create healthy families and healthy communities, DHS believes a multigenerational, culturally appropriate approach that invests in children and families over the lifecycle is important to nurture well-being and improve health outcomes. HOPE serves as an initiative to implement a roadmap to achieve this vision, with the help of our health plans.

“We consider the health plans valuable partners to help deliver better health outcomes by focusing on primary care and preventive care, addressing the complex health needs of individuals, and supporting members and their families who are facing multiple social risk factors that ultimately affect their health, such as homelessness,” said Judy Mohr Peterson, administrator of the Med-QUEST Division.

About 63,000 Hawai‘i residents have become Medicaid beneficiaries since the pandemic began, bringing the statewide total of beneficiaries to more than 390,000. This represents a 19% increase in statewide enrollment from a year ago. The increase is most pronounced in Maui county and Kaua‘i county, where the increases are up nearly 21% and 19%, respectively, over the same time last year.





HO'OPONO SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

Annual White Cane Walk Goes Virtual in 2021

A **MIDST THE PANDEMIC AND RESTRICTIONS**, Ho'opono Services for the Blind continued the tradition to celebrate the White Cane walk in the times of COVID-19 in a new and different way—virtually.

Organized in Hawai'i by DVR Ho'opono Services for the Blind, the walk is known to demonstrate to the community the importance of the white cane to not only blind and visually impaired communities, but also to raise pedestrian awareness and safety to motorists. The white cane empowers blind and visually impaired individuals with independence, freedom and confidence.

The walk is a celebration of this independence, empowerment and partnerships.

In 2021, administrator Lea Dias and Community services director, Gavan Abe put together a wonderful virtual white cane walk that educates, inspires and celebrates! Featuring many of the staff, students, parents and community partners, the viewer gets an "Insider's" look at the wonderful community Ho'opono Services of the Blind nurtures.

Dave Eveland, administrator of Ho'opono for many years from 1994-2009, takes the viewer down memory lane, sharing Hawai'i's history with the White Cane Walk. Cane travel instructor, Shellford Cantan, shares tips and tricks on how to use a cane and the different pros and cons of the different styles of canes. The virtual celebration also features stories from the perspectives of a parent of a blind child, a high school student and a kūpuna who all came to Ho'opono to learn blind skills to gain independence.

The celebration continues as Ho'opono Services for the Blind celebrates competitive, integrated employment, announcing the 2021 recipients of the Employee and Employer of the Year awards. The celebration concludes with Dean Georgiev, supervisor of the New Visions program who walks downtown with a group of his staff and students on a scaled down White Cane Walk.

To view the 2021 Virtual White Cane walk, please go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_O88rbchwo.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) provides services to Hawai'i community members who experience barriers to employment due to a physical or cognitive disability. Vocational rehabilitation services are designed to assist job seekers with disabilities prepare, secure, and retain competitive employment in an integrated work setting.

DVR Celebrates 100 Years

► **IN 2020**, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) celebrated 100 years as Hawai'i's primary agency of choice for persons with disabilities who are looking to enter or retain integrated, competitive employment statewide.

With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in July of 2014, DVR has worked with core partners from the Department of Labor and Industrial relations, Department of Education, Department of Health, University of

Hawai'i, as well as divisions within DHS to develop impactful and integrated services. Under the WIOA, DVR has embraced initiatives to invest in the skills of students with disabilities along with their families, as well as disenfranchised youth, as they access opportunities to become self-sufficient adults in tomorrow's workforce. DVR remains committed to partnering with Hawai'i's employers to reinforce networks of support so participants can achieve their hopes and aspirations for meaningful employment and thrive as active citizens in our community.

Department of Human Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services



VR100
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION • 1920-2020



HO'OPONO SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

94-year-old learns Braille at Ho'opono Services

IN 2020, 94-YEARS OLD BETTY PETHERBRIDGE may have quite possibly been the oldest person to study braille at Ho'opono Services for the Blind. She developed glaucoma and macular degeneration later in life, but that didn't stop her from the challenge of learning braille, a tactile code used for reading and writing. Petherbridge said learning braille takes a lot of concentration, but her positive attitude to practice is an inspiration to many. Her motivation to learn braille was to keep her mind sharp and read her bible, and other books. Many of Ho'opono's instructors are blind, so they are able to teach from a perspective that helps students learn the skills necessary to live full lives despite their conditions. Gavan Abe, Ho'opono's community services coordinator shares, "A lot of times in society, blindness is perceived as a negative thing. Fear, helplessness. That's where we come in, to change that perspective." Petherbridge's advice to seniors who think they're too old to learn something new, she says to keep trying and learning. Her story was shared by Jim Mendoza from *Hawaii News Now*, and can be viewed at <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2020/01/25/new-tricks-year-old-may-be-oldest-person-learn-braille-hoopono/>.

State Rehabilitation Council

► **THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (SRC)** was established to carry out its purpose by performing the following duties and responsibilities: Review, analyze and advise the VR agency regarding its performance of responsibilities that affect the ability of consumers to achieve employment outcomes; Develop, agree to and review State goals and priorities of the VR program; Assist VR in the preparation of the VR State Plan, amendments to the plan and needs assessment; Review and analyze the effectiveness of the VR Program and consumer satisfaction; Prepare and submit a VR annual report to the Governor and Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration; and Coordinate its activities with the activities of other disability-related councils within the State.

BLIND VENDORS DURING THE SHUT DOWN

DUE TO THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC and COVID-19 shutdown of government buildings, blind vendors nationwide experienced the devastating loss of income. In 2021, Hawai'i received \$498,584 in funding to provide financial relief and restoration payments to offset losses for blind vendors called the Randolph-Sheppard Financial Restoration and Relief Payments (FRRP). Additionally, the Randolph-Sheppard Account and the Business Enterprise Program provided supports, PPE and benefits to vendors throughout the pandemic.

While blind vendors focused on preparing to reopen, they also needed to secure access to plexiglas and hand sanitizer as it was high in demand. DHS provided support with countertop plexi shields, hand-sanitizing liquid, surface cleaners, gloves, face-shields, cash trays and social distancing signage for the facilities to reopen. Other challenges included labor shortages, resulting in higher prices and raised minimum order amounts from suppliers who had to maintain their high-margin delivery routes.

While most vendors reported little to no income as a result of the pandemic and staff teleworking in public buildings, others, particularly in airports or with military contracts, earned considerably more.

The Social Services Division (SSD) is committed to promoting the health, safety, and well-being of children and vulnerable adults throughout the State of Hawai'i. The division is comprised of two branches: Adult Protective and Community Services Branch (APCSB) and Child Welfare Services Branch (CWS). Together these branches envision a future where all citizens of Hawai'i are cherished and safe in nurturing families and communities.

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

FAMILY FIRST HAWAI‘I ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Family First Hawai‘i Plan provides CWS with the framework to dramatically reform how they serve children and families with the ultimate goal of keeping families safely together.

THE FAMILY FIRST Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) provided Hawai‘i with the opportunity to leverage federal Title IV-E funding for prevention services with the goal of keeping children safe at home with their families. The Family First Prevention Services Act Plan: Family First Hawai‘i (FFH), Keeping Families Together, was approved by DHS’s federal partner agency, Administration for Children and Families. Hawai‘i was the first state in Region 9 to receive approval of the plan. The approved FFH plan provides CWS with

The collective goal is to keep children and families at the center of practice by weaving in culture and values that our families in Hawai‘i embrace.

the framework and pathway to dramatically reform how CWS serves children and families and expands resources with the ultimate goal of preventing children from entering foster care by providing family strengthening services to keep families safely together.

This accomplishment is a result of extensive planning, design, and implementation that began in October 2019. The collaboration with other state departments, private and community service providers, advocates, legislators, the legal community and those with lived expertise in the foster care and child welfare system made this final plan possible.

Through these efforts, CWS created the Family First Hawai‘i Pū‘olo Metaphor video, providing an overview of the concepts that created the Family First Hawai‘i initiative. CWS created this video as a way to communicate with staff and families about the importance of keeping families together, the tagline of the FFH initiative. National foundation, Casey Family Programs, CWS staff, local cultural experts from EPIC ‘Ohana, Inc. – Nā Kama a Hāloa created the video in partnership with one another.

The collective goal is to keep children and families at the center of practice by weaving in culture and values that our families in Hawai‘i embrace. To build stronger connections throughout the community, a metaphor/story/mo‘olelo was created to share the message of keeping families together.

Each piece of the metaphor is important and plays a significant role to the success of this systemic shift in not only how CWS does their work, but why they do their work, and who benefits from the work they do. CWS developed and customized the video depicting the efforts of FFH in a culturally sensitive approach to address the disproportionate number of Native Hawaiians served by the child welfare system.

Children identifying as native Hawaiians and/or Pacific Islanders who are investigated by CWS are found to be victims of neglect or abuse at a higher rate than other racial groups. Specifically, at a rate near to twice as high as children who are white.

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Housing vouchers for youth exiting foster care

THE FOSTER YOUTH TO INDEPENDENCE (FYI) INITIATIVE makes Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) assistance available to Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) in partnership with Public Child Welfare Agencies (PCWAs). Under FYI, PHAs provide housing assistance on behalf of youth between 18 and 24 years of age who left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days, in accordance with a transition plan described in Section 475(5)(H) of the Social Security Act, and are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless at age 16 or older.

As required by statute, an FYI Competitive voucher issued to such a youth may only be used to provide housing assistance for the youth for a maximum of 36 months. In addition to providing up to 36 months of rental assistance, youth must be provided supportive services to assist the young person on their path to self-sufficiency.

Statistics show 1 in 4 youth become homeless after they transition out of foster care. James Potts was just 9 years old when he went into foster care, and when he turned 18, he “aged out” of the program. Brooke Ward of Hale Kipa’s Independent Living Program helped Potts find housing, and it wasn’t easy. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development gives states housing vouchers through its Foster Youth to Independence

Initiative or FYI. Under the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Services and the Hawai‘i Public Housing Authority, Hale Kipa and other non-profits around the state now have more housing options for kids leaving foster care.

“It’s an amazing opportunity for our young adults. They can live wherever they choose as long as the voucher is accepted,” Ward said. An FYI voucher limits how much of a recipient’s income must be used for rent and helps make up the difference.

The three-year program gives youth exiting foster care time to prepare to pay full rent on their own. That includes HUD’s vouchers.

“To fill the gaps that it’s filling with our other housing programs has made a huge difference,” Ward said.

Hale Kipa is in the process of awarding the 25 vouchers it received from HUD. Potts’ voucher helps him pay rent on a studio apartment in Kakaako. He has a job and hopes to attend the University of Hawai‘i. After spending much of his life moving between foster homes, he’s happy to finally have a comfortable place he can call his own.

HI H.O.P.E.S. Match/ Passport Program

► EPIC ‘OHANA’S HI H.O.P.E.S. INITIATIVE works to ensure that young people who’ve experienced foster care have the relationships, resources and opportunities they need for success. By working with public and private partners on the state and local level, their initiative is to improve policies and practices, promote youth voice and engagement, apply evaluation and research, and create community partnerships. The HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative creates opportunities for young people to achieve positive outcomes in permanency, education, employment, housing, health, financial capability, and social capital.

One of those opportunities is the Opportunity Passport Program. This program helps young people ages 17-26 learn about money management, savings and credit. In the financial Literacy class, youth learn about budgets, credit and why good credit is important. Anyone who attends and is approved gets \$140 to attend and gets the cash in a savings account in their name. They can also qualify for up to \$3000, receiving \$1000 each year they participate. They can use that money to make qualifying purchases on housing, mental, dental and health, education and training, vehicle and related purchase expenses, investment accounts, business startups, credit building and credit repair.





CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

A Cooperative effort for Child Recovery Operation “Shine the Light”

OPERATION “SHINE THE LIGHT” was a cooperative effort between federal, state and local agencies, including four non-profit organizations. The Department of the Attorney General and the DHS worked with the Federal Bureau of Investigations, U.S. Marshalls, U.S. Secret Service, Homeland Security Investigations, Honolulu Police Department, Susannah Wesley Community Center, Hale Kipa, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and the National Child Protection Task Force on this joint task force centered on the recovery of endangered and runaway foster youth in October 2020.

The operation resulted in five children being recovered, between the ages of 16-17. There are a number of custodial interference, child endangerment, and trafficking

investigations ongoing.

This cooperative operation between Federal, State, and local agencies is a first of its kind in Hawai‘i and an incredibly important milestone in our efforts to combat the exploitation of our youth,” said Hawai‘i Attorney General Clare E. Connors. “We are committed to finding those who exploit, target and traffic children in our state, and I am grateful to our partners as well as proud of our dedicated public servants for their tireless fight.”

There’s a misconception that runaways choose to leave their placement, but the truth is it’s a much more complicated issue. This operation was at the intersection of ICAC TF partner and child welfare services and was designed with one goal in mind: to show our foster kids that we see you and to remind them that their lives matter.

The Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (“ICAC”) and the Missing Child Center-Hawai‘i (“MCCH”) are both within the Department of the Attorney

“It is undeniable and unfortunate reality that this pandemic has highlighted the increase risk of exploitation for our most vulnerable youth. It takes collaborative strategy, swift action, and an utmost care for these youth in order to respond to their needs.”

General. Hawai‘i ICAC is part of a nationwide network of task forces dedicated to protecting children in the online environment. It accomplishes this goal through education, investigation and prosecution. MCCH operates as the State’s missing children clearinghouse and a resource for law enforcement, social services, and families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in decreased opportunities for concerned citizens and mandatory reporters to recognize and report signs of child abuse and neglect. Perpetrators and traffickers target vulnerable children: runaway youth from the foster care system; children who have been physically or sexually abused; and youth experiencing substance abuse or homelessness.

“It is an undeniable and unfortunate reality that this pandemic has highlighted the increased risk of exploitation for our most vulnerable youth. It takes collaborative strategy, swift action, and an utmost care for these youth in order to respond to their needs,” said Cathy Betts, DHS Director. “I am proud of our child welfare services team for the hard work that they do and for their collaborative spirit in taking on this project. The success of this project is a reminder to all of our workers that their efforts matter and have an impact on the lives of others.”

Systems have been working at capacity, especially during this pandemic. But through interagency collaboration, streamlining efforts and working collectively and synchronously, the task force was able to recover the children and hold adults accountable for their actions.

Eli S. Miranda, Special Agent in Charge at the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Honolulu Field Office shared, “The FBI will leverage the full extent of its resources to protect our children in Hawai‘i. We will continue working with all our partner agencies and members of the public to reunite missing children with their families.” Miranda went on to say, “As part of the law enforcement community, the FBI is unwavering in its commitment to protecting our keiki from dangerous predators that attempt to exploit our most innocent and vulnerable citizens.”

“Runaway youth are at a high risk of being trafficked, especially in a high cost of living area such as Hawai‘i. It’s difficult for them to afford basic needs such as food and shelter. Traffickers take advantage of this fact, exploiting vulnerable young people by forcing them to exchange sex for a place to stay or something to eat,” said Lucia Cabral-DeArmas, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Homeland Security Investigations Honolulu field office. “Combating human trafficking is part of the core mission of HSI, and we are proud to partner with the ICAC task force to bring our keiki in from the streets where they are vulnerable to this type of exploitation.”

Although this operation has led to a positive outcome, there are many more children who may fall prey to sex traffickers and online predators. With distance learning, and the decrease of sports and summer school programs, this pandemic has increased the amount of time that youth spend on the internet.

Education, training, and awareness are paramount to being able to protect our keiki. We cannot combat the epidemic of child exploitation without partnering with our community. Anyone with information regarding missing children or the exploitation of children is encouraged to contact the local police department or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.



New Online Application Portal to Modernize the Foster Care Licensing and Application Process

► **CHILD WELFARE SERVICES (CWS)** launched a new online portal that modernizes the resource caregiver licensing process from the traditional paper process to a simpler, more efficient, and user-friendly system for applicants. It optimizes the matching process by identifying the resource caregiver based on a keiki’s (infant - 18 years old) unique needs. Staff can assess what homes are available in the child’s community/ neighborhood allowing the child to maintain healthy ties to their school and community. The link to this portal is rcg.hawaii.gov.

“The health, well-being and safety of the children and families served are at the heart of everything CWS does,” shared Daisy Hartsfield, Social Services Division Administrator. “CWS wanted to better serve children in care and this new portal modernizes the entire licensing and application process while increasing the numbers of qualified resource caregivers in Hawai‘i, who can provide stable, safe and loving homes for children and youth in foster care.”

The portal will also be used by DHS’ community-based partner agencies that assist CWS with supporting families, through the licensing families. To learn more about the software used to power the portal visit binti.com.

AGENCIES AND COMMISSIONS

The Department of Human Services has administratively attached agencies that are independent agencies linked to the department for purposes of reporting and sharing support services. Some of these agencies and commissions include Hawai'i Public Housing Authority, the Hawai'i Interagency Council on Homelessness, Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness, Office of Youth Services, Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women and Hawai'i Commission on Fatherhood.

GOVERNOR'S COORDINATOR ON HOMELESSNESS

CHANGING LIVES AT HALE MALUHIA

Hale Maluhia offers permanent housing with on-site supportive services for survivors of domestic violence.

HUNDREDS OF domestic violence survivors and their children receive statewide shelter and housing services from providers each day.

While the array of supportive services offered ranges from counseling and safety planning to emergency sheltering and housing, all providers agree that more resources are needed to meet the growing demand.

In March 2020, the City & County of Honolulu, in partnership with the Domestic Violence Action Center, opened a permanent housing project for survivors of domestic violence at Hale Maluhia. Using funds from the State's 'Ohana Zone pilot program, Hale Maluhia offers permanent housing with on-site supportive services for twenty survivors and their children.

"Housing is the number-one problem for survivors who are trying to leave their abuser," says Lydia Pavon, a fifteen-year advocate with the Domestic Violence Action Center and the current manager of Hale Maluhia. Without safe housing alternatives, victims are often left with few options. "If they have nowhere to go,"

Lydia says, "they may feel like they have to return to their abuser."

The facility, which began welcoming residents at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, could not have opened at a better time. Moving new residents into their own apartments was a critical component of implementing appropriate social distancing in existing domestic violence shelters, although the impacts of the new project will extend far beyond the pandemic.

For survivors who are involved in legal custody disputes, having a permanent place to live can have life-changing implications for themselves and their children.

Sarah, who is court-ordered to share custody of her young daughter with her abuser, explains it plainly: "Sometimes the abuser gets custody just because they have stable housing and you don't."

During her stay at a domestic violence emergency shelter, Sarah relentlessly pursued every potential housing option available. "I applied for everything," she recalls. "You can't just get comfortable once you get into a shelter because there's a time limit." In most cases, survivors may stay up to 90 days at

a domestic violence shelter, with the possibility of an extension if needed.

Finding safe, affordable housing is a challenge for many working families in Hawai'i, where the average rent for a two-bedroom unit can exceed \$2,000. Even when housing is identified, many survivors struggle to meet the necessary rental qualifications.

"Many survivors have never had their own lease agreement before moving into Hale Maluhia," says Marci Lopes, Deputy Director of the Domestic Violence Action Center.

Housing Solutions, Inc., which manages Hale Maluhia, takes extra steps to provide flexibility to applicants whenever possible. The property management company has been able to offer leases to applicants who would otherwise fail to qualify for housing at most other locations.

For the twenty survivors and their children who are rebuilding their lives at Hale Maluhia, the combination of permanent housing and on-site wraparound services fosters a sense of community and healing that would be impossible to replicate in scattered-site locations.

"It's a blessing," another resident said. "We're in good hands now."

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

DUE TO COVID-19, Domestic Violence Action Center's Helpline established a new number to respond to text messages from survivors in March 2020. This helpline provided support, risk assessment, safety planning, resources and referrals to Domestic Violence Action Center's advocacy and legal services to survivors who may be unable to talk on the phone while in quarantine. In a time when companies are encouraging employees to work remotely, and the CDC is encouraging "social distancing," an abuser may take advantage of an already stressful situation to gain more control.



PROTECTING HOMELESS SERVICE PROVIDERS

► **MAHALO TO THE GENEROUS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERS** who have donated Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness, critical frontline workers. Since April 2020, DHS and the Department of Health, in partnership with the Community Resilience Hubs, have supplied thousands of PPE units to behavioral health and homeless service providers statewide. PPE distributions to behavioral health and homeless service providers have been made possible by partners the Office of Governor, Constituent Services, Hawaii Cyber Lions Clubs, Office of Representative Gregg Takayama, EveryOne Hawaii, Kamehameha School, Hawaii Foodservice Alliance, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Tzu Chi USA, Hawaii, Hawaii Community Foundation, KROC Center, KEY Project, YMCA



18,387
DISPOSABLE GLOVES



26,950
SURGICAL MASKS



11,471
N95 & KN95 MASKS



10,875
CLOTH/ HOMEMADE MASKS



55
BLEACH/ SANITIZER
(GALLOONS)



2,613
FACE SHIELDS, GOWNS,
BOOTIES

Hawai'i Interagency Council on Homelessness

► **THE HAWAII' I INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS (HICH)** was established in July 2011 through executive order by Gov. Neil Abercrombie. Composed of state department directors, federal agency representatives, and community leaders, HICH was tasked with providing solutions to end homelessness and strengthen the continuity of efforts to end homelessness across future State of Hawai'i administrations. The HICH is required to report annually to the governor, the state Legislature, and the mayor of each county on the progress of its activities, including formulation and progress of the 10-year plan no later than 20 days prior to the convening of each regular session. The HICH adopted a plan consistent with the approach taken by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) created by President Barack Obama in 2010 to end homelessness throughout the nation. Hawai'i was the first state in the union to create a state interagency council patterned after the USICH.

GOVERNOR'S COORDINATOR ON HOMELESSNESS

STATE LIBRARY EXPANDS HOMELESS PARTNERSHIP

The new partnership increases access to help library patrons in need of social services.

SINCE MARCH 2019, social work student Helana Kama has provided social services at the State Library's main branch downtown, linking homeless individuals to shelter, hygiene services, substance abuse treat-

ment, and housing. The services are the result of a new partnership between the State Library, the office of the Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness (GCH), and the University of Hawai'i Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work to increase access to help for library patrons.

A typical day for Helena includes making her rounds in the library rotunda and engaging individuals in need of services. Helena encountered an elderly male who had been homeless for four months. After a few short phone calls, Helena facilitated a placement into Hale Mauiola, a shelter on Sand Island operated by the Institute for Human Services (I.H.S.). The next day, a HPD officer transported the man to shelter and called



Helena to let her know he was successfully admitted. "It felt great," said Helena, "because I was there for him from beginning until end."

Beyond just making connections to shelter, Helena spends her days assisting veterans with housing search, sharing information about how individuals can apply for State benefits, and sharing information about where a homeless individual can receive mail. "With this population, my eyes are wide open," said Helena. Each day is unique and beyond providing services for the homeless, the experience is also providing Helena with training for a future career in social work following her graduation next year.

The partnership with the State Library and School of Social Work is one of many similar efforts aimed at increasing access to shelter and other services for people experiencing homelessness. In addition to the library effort, partnerships with HPD, Department of Transportation and the Department of Land and Natural Resources resulted in over-400 homeless individuals being connected from State lands to shelter and other placements in 2018. To learn more about State efforts to address homelessness and to read the State Framework to Address Homelessness, visit <https://homelessness.hawaii.gov>.

Success Story: Waikiki Calvin

► **THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR'S** Coordinator on Homelessness frequently receives messages from individuals who are concerned about family members or friends who may have become homeless while living in Hawai'i. Their office is usually contacted as a last resort, after months - sometimes years - of unsuccessful attempts to reach their loved ones.

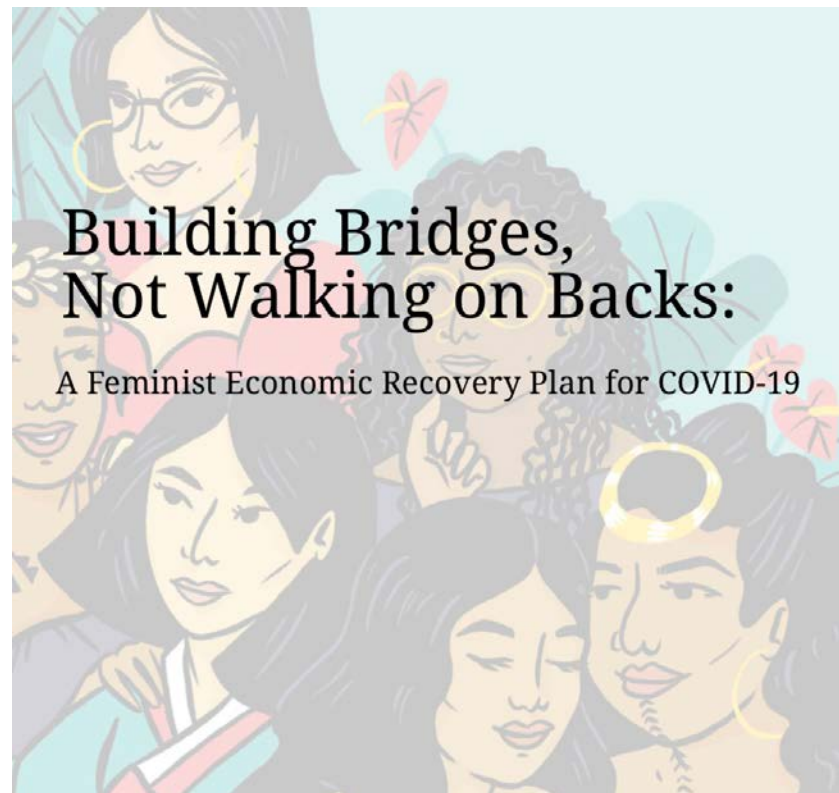
"Calvin," a 55-year-old homeless individual who suffered from physical and mental health issues, came to O'ahu for a fresh start with his girlfriend. He received income benefits due to his health problems, but he soon found himself sleeping on the streets of Waikiki after leaving the relationship. With insufficient income and no support

system, he was unable to afford a room, and was struggling with substance abuse which worsened his physical and mental health. Worried about their father living on the streets during the COVID-19 pandemic, Calvin's daughters reached out to GCH for information about programs that might be familiar with Calvin. Upon hearing that Calvin was in Waikiki, GCH staff immediately contacted the outreach team from the Institute for Human Services, who knew Calvin by name and were able to engage him the next day. Thanks to the homeless outreach department's efforts, I.H.S.' Family Reunification Program successfully connected Calvin with his daughters on the mainland. It was a difficult conversation with lots of emotion, but Calvin was grateful for the



opportunity to return to the mainland to live with his family.

Calvin is one example of the many types of referrals that GCH receives, and his reunification with his family is an excellent example of how GCH's homeless services system works collaboratively to assist society's most vulnerable members.

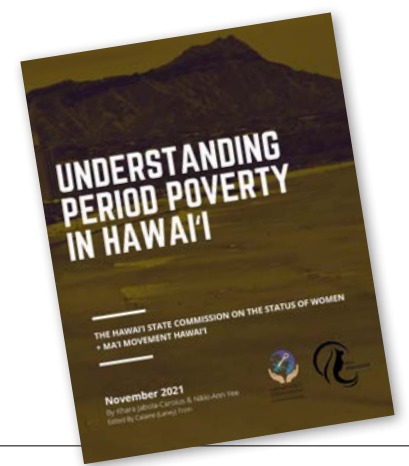


UNDERSTANDING PERIOD POVERTY IN HAWAI'I

THE HAWAI'I COMMISSION on the Status of Women and the Ma'i Movement Hawai'i partnered on a report that aims to build a storehouse of knowledge on period poverty in Hawai'i. Period Poverty is shorthand for systemic lack of access to period supplies, such as pads and tampons. Inadequate menstrual health and hygiene education, cultural shame and stigma surrounding menstration, and a lack of running water or sanitary locations to maintain personal hygiene are some of the circumstances that often lead to menstrual inequity.

The paper explores the structural sources of period poverty in Hawai'i with reviews and survey results from 361 Hawai'i residents about their experiences with menstration. The vast majority of participants identified as women, but a number identified as gender non-conforming and māhū. The report also tests support for policy related to menstration and finds that a majority of participants favor government provision of period supplies.

Women's vulnerability and dependency continues today, and the report is intended to provide an initial snapshot of menstration issues in Hawai'i. To view a copy of the report, please visit <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/hscsw/understanding-period-poverty-in-hawaii-report/>.



HAWAI'I STATE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Building Bridges, Not Walking on Backs

THROUGH THE COLLABORATION of Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women (HSCSW) Executive Director Khara Jabola-Carolus and other members of the community, "Building Bridges, Not Walking on Backs" was developed to ensure a collaborative approach for "Hawai'i's Economic and Community Recovery & Resiliency Plan" was put in place. In particular, bringing together the voices of organizations working to advance gender equity. The document represents a living and evolving agenda for a feminist

COVID-19 response and recovery that highlights key and emerging principles and recommendations.

Recommendations include seeking input from impacted, essential sectors that employ a majority of women and organizations that serve women, girls and people who identify as women, femme and nonbinary into the COVID-19 response, recovery and stimulus plan. Ensuring no cuts to social services, including services for domestic violence and other women's issues. Using federal stimulus funds to promote reform and programs in the areas that build the state's social infrastructure of child-care, education and healthcare that has been known to be more effective in reducing public deficits and debt, while boosting employment, earnings, economic growth and fostering gender equality. The reports hopes to make space for community ideas that speak not only about response and recovery, but also of repair and revival. Please visit <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/hscsw/> to view a copy of the report.

DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

Cathy Betts Named 2021 Rhonda Lewis Award Recipient

THE HAWAI'I WOMEN'S LEGAL FOUNDATION (HWLF) awarded DHS director, Cathy Betts with the 2021 Rhonda Lewis Award, in recognition of her extraordinary contribution and commitment to public service. The Rhonda Lewis Award is named after the first female member of the Hawai'i Supreme Court, and each year HWLF honors a woman attorney who has devoted her career to public service. Consistent with the spirit of the award, the recipient is someone who has toiled in the trenches; one of the "unsung heroes."

"Throughout her career and work in the community, Cathy has shown unparalleled grace, resilience, and humility and a quiet and unwavering resolve to do what is right. She is a source of inspiration to many and so richly deserving of this year's Rhonda Lewis Award," noted HWLF President, Lauren Sharkey.

As the director of one of the largest agencies in the state, Betts leads the vital task of providing safety net services for vulnerable populations to include those who have been economically and sociologically impacted by COVID-19. From 2017 through August 2020, Betts served as the department's Deputy Director and continues to further the department's vision through her experience, advocacy, and commitment to helping the people of Hawai'i thrive.

A 2006 graduate of the William S. Richardson School of Law, Betts has dedicated much of her life to supporting and advocating for the rights of women and girls as well as families in Hawai'i. She has spearheaded legislation for women promoting and protect-

ing their reproductive freedom and timely access to reproductive health care, their rights as domestic workers, supporting equitable compensation and benefits, increasing protections for breastfeeding women, and helping to ensure safe workplaces for survivors of intimate partner and other forms of gender-based violence.

Betts has led and co-led numerous committees and task forces in Hawai'i addressing issues affecting women and girls including our community's response to domestic violence, addressing the sexual assault evidence collection kit backlog, Title IX compliance, pregnancy discrimination and public accommodation, and safety at our courts as well as securing financial resources to help research a paid family leave program.

She is currently on the Board of Directors for the Hawai'i Filipino Lawyers Association, and previously chaired the HSBA Diversity, Equality, and the Law Committee (DEAL). She also sits on the Committee on Equality and Access to the Courts.

As a former practicing attorney, she has litigated divorce and custody cases as well as handled temporary restraining order trials, and child abuse and neglect matters, among others. Betts has served on the Board of Directors for the Hawai'i Women Lawyers and Hawai'i Filipino Lawyers and as a Commissioner of the Honolulu County Committee on the Status of Women. She is the former Executive Director of the State of Hawai'i Commission on the Status of Women.

HAWAI'I COMMISSION ON FATHERHOOD

THE MISSION OF THE HAWAI'I STATE COMMISSION ON FATHERHOOD (COF) is to promote healthy family relationships by emphasizing the important role fathers play in the lives of their children. The Commission serves in an advisory capacity to state agencies and makes recommendations on programs, services, contracts, policies, and laws relating to children and families. Motivated by a renewed understanding of a father's vital role in family and community life, the 2003 Hawai'i State Legislature established the Commission on Fatherhood through Act 156; in June 2007, Hawai'i Act 190 made it permanent. The commissioners operate independently, but the commission is administratively attached to the Department of Human Services. Four standing committees implement Commission projects and activities that provides information and education, policies and practices, public relations and promotion and events and recognition.



HAWAI‘I YOUTH CORRECTIONAL FACILITY (HYCF)

HYCF IS A 30-BEDS FACILITY that provides custody, care and rehabilitation of juvenile offenders who have committed serious or violent law violations. HYCF strives to provide programs and services that aid and prepare the youths for reintegration into the community through various counseling, treatment and educational services to the youths. A DOE structured program follows the DOE school calendar and provides summer school for the youth. Substance abuse services, collaborating with the Alcohol and Drug-Abuse Division (ADAD) of the Department of Health (DOH), provide prevention education to the youths in the facility and community.

The facility also provides vocational training to the youths with positive behavioral reinforcements. The youth may choose between these vocational areas: Auto repair, animal husbandry, aquaculture, building maintenance, carpentry, and food service. Since November 2019, HYCF implemented a Teens Outreach Program where youths engage in sensitive topics and in dealing with their trauma, they learn to give back to their community and be caring and responsive youths.

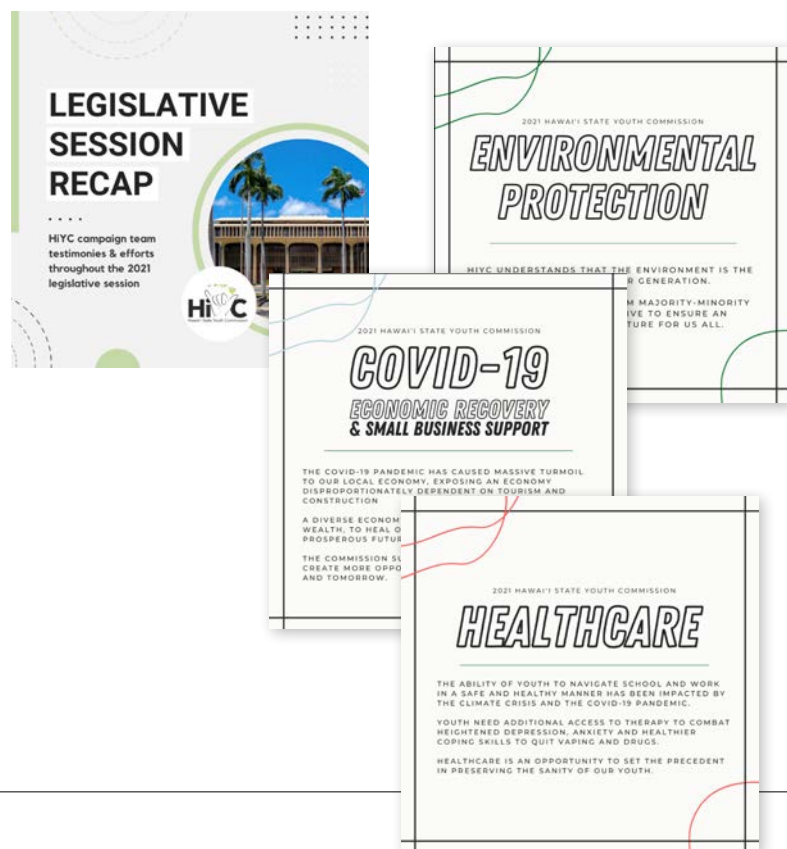
In July 2021, HYCF conducted a Victim Impact Class to a pilot group of youths that provided training on ten core crime topics that brought in survivors that shared their stories of how these crimes impacted their lives. In addition, Hoku Group Services uses the Prevention Education Empowerment and Resilience curriculum to teach the importance of keeping female youth safe from exploitation and trafficking in an appropriate way for their age and culture. HYCF also provides a mentoring program called the Starfish Mentoring Program that partners youth with an adult mentor that builds the youths’ self worth.

OFFICE OF YOUTH SERVICES

Hawai‘i State Youth Commission

FORMED TO ADVISE THE GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE on the effects of legislative policies, needs, assessments, priorities, programs, and budgets concerning the youth, the Hawai‘i State Youth Commission (HiYC) was formed. In June 2020, the first cohort of Hawai‘i State Youth Commissioners were chosen, consisting of 15 members, ages 14-24, appointed by the Governor, the Senate President, and the Speaker of the House. They include representation from Kaua‘i, O‘ahu, Lāna‘i, Moloka‘i, Maui, and the island of Hawai‘i. Together, they represent resilience and redemption in the policy making process and offer valuable insights to the future of Hawai‘i.

The top three legislative priorities for the 2021 session included: 1) Environmental Protection lead by Shwe Win. HiYC understands that the environment is the most pressing issue of our generation, thus, it is imperative to ensure an equitable, sustainable future. 2) COVID-19 Economic Recovery and Small Business Support lead by Kainalu Morimoto. The COVID-19 pandemic caused massive turmoil to our local economy with Hawai‘i having one of the highest unemployment rate in the U.S. HiYC believes a diverse economy is needed to create a more prosperous future by supporting small businesses and advocating for solutions to the impacts of safety, security and wellbeing. 3) Health care, lead by Mallory Go. HiYC believes Hawai‘i’s youth need additional access to therapy to combat heightened depression and anxiety along with healthier coping skills to quit vaping and drugs. The COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis has drastically affected the ability for youth to navigate school and work in a safe and healthy manner.



HAWAI‘I PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to starkly demonstrate the importance of housing as a fundamental underpinning for personal, as well as community health.

U**NDERSTANDING** their mission of promoting adequate, affordable housing and economic opportunities for low-income families and individuals, free from discrimination has never been more critical, Hawai‘i Public Housing Authority’s (HPHA) creativity, resolve, resilience, collaboration, agility and care in the face of the unparalleled COVID-19 pandemic forced a new way of thinking, living and serving.

No time was wasted in adjusting the way this agency moved its operations into higher gear. HPHA ensured over 35,000 people they served were kept informed and safe. Tens of thousands of staff-made reusable cloth and commercial face coverings were distributed to tenants statewide. HPHA partnered with the University of Hawai‘i to keep tenants informed through a new COVID-19 website, www.hphaishereforyou.org. They also partnered with Spectrum to launch free Wi-Fi at ten public housing properties to encourage distance learning and telehealth and partnered with the Department of Health Public Health Nurses and the National Guard and nonprofits to educate staff and tenants and provide free COVID-19 testing.

HPHA also implemented its first online Section 8 application and lottery selection for a “Lease in Place” preference to serve 750 families, provided online direct deposit for rent payments, worked expeditiously to focus on repairing vacant units, provided 16 newly constructed public housing units at the Lanakila Homes property in Hilo, Hawai‘i and 28 modernized public housing units at the Salt Lake Apartments property on O‘ahu.

In 2021, continued efforts to provide safe and affordable housing to the most disadvantaged members of the commu-

nity was at the forefront. Partnering with a wide array of stakeholders, the HPHA staff coordinated 55 vaccination and booster shot clinics, collaborated with all counties to receive hundreds of thousands in Emergency Rental Assistance funding to keep hundreds of tenants housed; provided Housing Assistance for over 45,000 tenants across all our programs; provided housing to over 2,000 new families; successfully completed the State of Hawai‘i’s first Federal Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD); converted dozens of additional units to wheelchair accessible and sensory units for the visual and hearing impaired; processed over 762,000 financial transactions and disbursed over \$186 million in expenditures, successfully launched the Aloha Cares Emergency Feeding Program resulting in the distribution of approximately 500,000 deliveries of fresh produce, groceries, and prepared meals to our low-income families, the elderly, disabled and COVID-19 affected

households; successfully positioned the School Street Elderly Affordable Housing project to have a groundbreaking of the first 250 new units (out of 800) by mid-2022; applied for and were awarded three (3) State Office of Planning and Sustainable Development TOD planning grants to benefit Lanakila Homes on Hawai‘i Island, Puuwai Momi on O‘ahu and Kahekili Terrace on Maui; in Kalaeloa, the HPHA completed the Kauhale pilot project on one of our vacant parcels resulting in the first micro-community comprised of 37 tiny homes that was spearheaded by HomeAid Hawaii and will be administered by U.S. VETS. For this CY21, HPHA’s total revenues exceeded \$201M, a 19% increase over the previous year.

HPHA administered the Aloha Cares Emergency Feeding Program (ACEFP) to approximately 500,000 elderly, disabled and COVID-19 exposed participants.

