



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Health and Homelessness
Wednesday, February 15, 2023 at 8:30 a.m.

By

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HB 1301 – RELATING TO CANCER

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i Cancer Center (UHCC) and John A Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) strongly supports HB 1301, which would appropriate revenues for UHCC to conduct a multi-ethnic cohort (MEC) study focusing on social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos.

This funding would provide vital resources to help initiate this long-term study, which would provide critical data to improve the cancer disparities and promote health equity in populations that experience high rates for many common cancers and continue to be understudied and underserved.

National data typically aggregate health information for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) and, thereby, ignore the rich cultural and lifestyle diversity of these populations and mask their marked differences in cancer incidence and outcomes. UHCC has decades of research experience studying cancer disparities in AANHPI. Disaggregated data have revealed stark cancer disparities across Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian American subgroups. For instance, Native Hawaiians, among other racial/ethnic groups in the US, have ones of the highest rates of lung, breast, colorectal, pancreatic, gastric, liver, endometrial and

cervical cancers. Pacific Islanders have high rates for many cancers that should be addressed through culturally tailored health education and prevention efforts, such as in smoking cessation and screening. This also holds true for Pacific Islanders in their home countries throughout the US Affiliated Pacific Island Jurisdictions, which is part of the UHCC catchment area. Filipino Americans have high incidence rates for lung, colorectal and thyroid cancer in Hawai'i, and rapidly increasing rates of breast and prostate cancers. Unfortunately, UHCC studies to date have shown that known risk factors do not fully explain these risk differences. Furthermore, due to gaps in the available data, such as on social determinants of health and environmental and occupational exposures, the specific reasons that drive these disparities remain unknown. A new study that captures such information would directly address these research gaps.

The proposed two-year project would establish the feasibility of recruiting participants for a long-term prospective study and greatly strengthen a grant application to NIH to fund the full-scale research. It will also build a strong partnership with these communities so as to define common priority research areas and assist with study recruitment and future dissemination of study findings.

The University of Hawai'i supports this measure, provided that its passage does not replace or impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents Approved Executive Biennium Budget.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.