

Recommendations

This report is somewhat unique as it strives to paint a more complete picture of the Native Hawaiian female experience in Hawai'i and what the betterment of their conditions might look like at the macro level. If we were able to include indicators of cultural connection, this picture would become even clearer. This report may lend some insight into why wāhine health needs more holistic interventions—departing from a conventional, siloed method for education, early detection, and treatment—and the effectiveness of supporting the whole person throughout her entire life. By creating partnerships for women across cultural groups, businesses, elected office, and communities, and using conscious and complementary approaches, the health and well-being of Native Hawaiian women and girls will be positively affected.

COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL INVESTMENT:

- » Honor the history of Hawai'i and the foundational principles of kānaka ʻōiwi.
- » Cultivate mana lāhui kānaka as cultural resiliency rooted in Hawaiian ancestral practices, while respecting traditional customs and ways of healing.
- » Promote programs and policies that support Native Hawaiians and their holistic well-being.
- » Align resources to prioritize the implementation of healthy and safe communities where Native Hawaiians live, work, and engage.
- » Establish a directory of Native Hawaiian professionals and community leaders with an understanding of Hawaiian culture for Governor-appointed leadership positions.
- » Endorse positive participation of wāhine in the media to empower women and encourage indigenous peoples through mainstream platforms.
- » Revitalize the accounts of Native Hawaiian women in communities and organizations which they contributed to their founding and successes.

POLICY ENFORCEMENT:

- » Act 155 (Reg. Sess. 2014) (Codified in HRS §226-20) (<https://19of32x2yl33s8o4xza0gf14-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/HRS226-20.pdf>) explicitly indicates that all State agencies should include SDH in policy planning and resourcing, and prioritize Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos.
- » Act 157 (Reg. Sess. 2014) (Codified in HRS §321-1) (https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2014/bills/GM1260_PDF) identifies health equity as a goal for the Department of Health, with consideration of SDH in assessing “state needs for health.” It also reinforces establishing programs that prevent domestic and sexual violence, and administer treatment for victims.

RESEARCH AND DATA:

- » Encourage collaborative efforts between government, schools, and other institutions which consider the determinants in women's health and well-being beyond clinical settings.
- » Include more wāhine in research to improve public understanding of the needs and gaps.
- » Disaggregate data by racial and ethnic groups to improve policy strategies and implementation.
- » Create data governance and data systems which can be accessed online.

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HAU MEA



Transforming the Health of Native Hawaiian Women and Empowering Wāhine Well-Being

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY and RECOMMENDATIONS





Contemporary wāhine (Native Hawaiian females) are just one part of a longer continuum—a mo'okū'auhau (genealogy)—of well-being and evolving determinants for women and girls. Grounded in the Kūkulu Hou Methodology, this report explores the traditional role of women in Native Hawaiian society and culture and their specialized mana wahine (feminine power). Traditionally, Native Hawaiian women exemplified ho'ōla (giving life) to their communities and 'ohana on multiple levels, but social, political, and economic changes in Hawai'i have transformed many ways which wāhine maintain their fullest well-being.

The health potential of Native Hawaiian females is influenced by several indicators of wellness: their social determinants of health (SDH). Barriers throughout infancy and adolescence often continue into adulthood, where wāhine face significant disparities in cancer, are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, and try to prosper despite alarming pay gaps.

Historical disconnect from cultural practices, 'ohana, and 'āina has led to further disruption in wāhine well-being—and, in turn, negatively affected the overall wellness of the Hawaiian community. To support contemporary wāhine, policy changes and advocacy across various agencies and organizations is necessary. Supporting cultural integration and resourcing community-based programming is essential to revitalize Native Hawaiian females and improve their wellness.

This history and analysis has been organized into six chapters: mental and emotional wellness, physical health, motherhood, partner violence and incarceration, economic well-being, and leadership and civic engagement. Each chapter features an overview of the roles of wāhine in Hawaiian society, historical strengths that contributed to thriving identities, data of current related issues, and recommendations—as well as perspectives from several contemporary wāhine.

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Mental and Emotional Wellness

E hānai ‘awa a ikaika ka makani.

Feed with kava so that the spirit may gain strength.

(‘ŌLELO NO‘EAU, #275)



ISSUE DATA:

- » Self-harm reported by ‘ōpio (adolescents): from depression and suicide ideation, to suicide attempts
- » Post-partum depression in young Native Hawaiian mothers

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

- » Address physical and mental health concerns in combination.
- » Strengthen social support to lessen stress across all age groups.
- » Provide appropriate school-based education and health centers.
- » Improve mental-health screening across the lifecycle, to include substance abuse risk and treatment.
- » Examine workplace associated stress factors among wāhine and the fields in which they are overrepresented.
- » Integrate child care and adult day care for intergenerational resiliency.

Physical Health

E ‘imi i ke ola mawaho.

Consult a kahuna to see what is causing the delay in healing.

Said when a person lies sick and recovery is slow.

(‘ŌLELO NO‘EAU, #311)



ISSUE DATA:

- » ‘Ōpio females skipping meals
- » Safe sex practices among Native Hawaiian girls starting in middle school
- » High obesity rates, especially among wāhine aged 45-54
- » Double rates of cancer among Native Hawaiian females

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

- » Resource Hawaiian neighborhoods with parks, walking areas, 21st century schools, affordable housing, and readily available fresh produce, while preserving cultural and sacred sites within communities.
- » Provide curriculum that teaches the various determinants impacting Native Hawaiian health.
- » Address social barriers associated with sexual and reproductive health, especially within schools.
- » Initiate and promote smoking- and electronic cigarette-cessation programs for young adults.
- » Explore systemic work to address asthma and obesity among wāhine.
- » Assess chronic conditions and pain among Native Hawaiian elders.

Motherhood

Ku‘u ēwe, ku‘u piko, ku‘u iwi, ku‘u koko.

My umbilical cord, my navel, my bones, my blood.

(‘ŌLELO NO‘EAU, #1932)



ISSUE DATA:

- » Wāhine have the highest rates of infant mortality in Hawai‘i
- » Wāhine <20 years old make up majority of extremely preterm births in Hawai‘i, especially in low-income communities

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

- » Establish culture-based programs that provide wāhine with high quality reproductive health services, family planning, and post-natal care.
- » Support healthy nutritional behaviors in mothers prior to and during pregnancy. Include traditional foods into diet and meal planning.
- » Provide maternal mental health screening support services for prevention and early diagnosis of postpartum depression.
- » Encourage exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of baby’s life.
- » Identify systems that promote healthy behaviors across the Native Hawaiian population, especially in at-risk families and low income districts.
- » Enhance data collection and research for managing trends, risks, and causes of maternal and infant mortality/morbidity, in order to create local interventions.

Intimate Partner Violence and Incarceration

Ke kua a kāmāwai.

The back [guarded by] law.

Said of Pele’s back, which was so that to stand behind or approach it was punishable by death. Her back was said to be so hot that a bundle of taro leaves placed on it would cook at once. Her priests, chiefs, and certain of her devotees had a similar kapu—no one was permitted to walk or pass behind them nor wear anything that had been worn upon such a kapu back.

(‘ŌLELO NO‘EAU, #1757).



ISSUE DATA:

- » ‘Ōpio are experiencing being controlled or emotional hurt by their dates/partners
- » Native Hawaiian females are almost half of the incarcerated population in Hawai‘i
- » Over half of women in “close” security prison are Native Hawaiian

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

- » Make screening and counseling available for sexual harassment, stalking, dating violence, and nonconsensual sexual contact.
- » Research trafficking crimes and trends among Native Hawaiian females, including youth.
- » Increase services for Native Hawaiians within the criminal justice system to promote integration back into the community and reduce recidivism rates.
- » Improve Hawai‘i’s civil protection orders to better support survivors of violence.
- » Offer resources for community members during their experiences with the criminal justice system, to include ho‘oponopono.
- » Update data collection and monitoring systems that make IPV and incarceration rates publicly accessible information.

Economic Well-Being

Hā‘awe i ke kua; hi‘i ke alo.

A burden on the back; a babe in the arms.

Said of a hardworking woman who carries a load on her back and a baby in her arms.

(‘ŌLELO NO‘EAU, #401)



ISSUE DATA:

- » Less than 15% of all women-owned businesses in Hawai‘i are owned by wāhine
- » Wāhine are paid 71 cents for every dollar men in Hawai‘i get paid
- » Less than 1% of wāhine are employed in computer and mathematical positions

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

- » Establish career pipelines that allow wāhine to network and gain support from professionals in STEM, business, law, health fields, etc.
- » Reduce the gender wage gap through policy changes and collective advocacy.
- » Increase the number of wahine-owned businesses as well as wāhine in managerial, executive, or professional fields.
- » Ensure a living wage that is adequate to cover the exceptionally high cost of living in Hawai‘i.
- » Support voluntary and gradual retirement for wāhine, and provide incentives for wāhine to save for retirement.
- » Coordinate health insurance coverage communication targeted toward employers of newly hired individuals aged 18–34.

Leadership and Civic Engagement

Kū ka lau lama.

Many torches stand.

There are many lighted bonfires, a signal of joy and victory.

(‘ŌLELO NO‘EAU, #1889)



SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

- » Nurture leadership skill development for students during middle school (grades 6–8).
- » Develop “student voice” when designing school-based interventions and include adolescents in decision- and policy-making processes.
- » Create a model for cultivating leadership with aims to energize wāhine in business, finance, sciences, health, law, natural resources, education, economics, and government.
- » Provide educational benefits and scholarships for employees who seek certification training or postsecondary degrees.
- » Create opportunities for promotion in middle management and executive levels.
- » Establish a cadre of Native Hawaiian female professionals who will serve on boards, commissions, and appointed positions at various levels of local government.