

THE HAWAI'I ISLAND PHYSICIAN SHORTAGE



A brief produced by Vibrant Hawai'i's
Health and Wellbeing Stream





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mahalo nui loa to each of our focus group participants who gave their time - after a long day of serving community - and entrusted us with one of life's most precious gifts: hope. Our hope is that this brief inspires action in immediate and meaningful ways to bring an end to the physician shortage on Hawai'i Island, and help us realize our vision of equitable access to health care for all.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 What providers wish others understood
- 3 Existing solutions
- 5 How can community members contribute?
- 6 What can we do together?
- 7 What policy recommendations do you have?
- 8 Resources

*Vibrant Hawai'i is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization on Hawai'i Island. Its mission is to dismantle silos by hosting conversations that **invite collaboration**, creating opportunities and environments that **build capacity, confidence, and courage to take action**, and publishing project outcomes to **advance equity, data justice, and asset based community development**.*

INTRODUCTION

On February 25, 2021, Vibrant Hawai'i convened a small group of stakeholders that have been implementing strategies to address the physician shortage on Hawai'i Island which rose from 230 to 287 over the past year. We asked these stakeholders 2 questions:

- **What do you understand about the problem that you wish other "problem solvers" also understood?**
- **What insight do you have about the/a solution?**

We hope this brief serves as a springboard for future conversations that lead to broader awareness of the issue and the role we each can play to address it. There are existing initiatives in need of support and opportunities for collaboration. Government leaders can help untangle the issue with policy changes. When community members are empowered to be part of the solution, we amplify impact.

WHAT PROVIDERS WISHED OTHERS UNDERSTOOD

Healthcare providers have unique insights into the realities of their profession and wish others understood their perspectives. By understanding these perspectives, patients, policymakers, and the community can better support providers and encourage them to remain on Hawai'i island.

IT DOESN'T MAKE FINANCIAL SENSE TO PRACTICE HERE

- Cost of living
- Financial challenges
- Challenging reimbursement and fee structures
- New physicians didn't have mechanism to catch up on with disparate fee structure
- We need differential for Medicare while looking at the bigger picture

THE SYSTEM MAKES IT HARDER THAN IT NEEDS TO BE

- Too much administrative burden, meeting quality measures
- Having an established support system in place to prevent burnout
- Admin burden is a big piece—not sustainable or viable, high staff turnover
- Less admin support here. Burnt out spending lots of time in the office, was bad before COVID and it's worse now

IT'S COMPLEX

- Unable to spend quality time with patients who have complex problems; "that's not why we got into medicine"
- Rural health issues/disparities
- Residents are not prepared for the complexities of the rural communities
- Patient acuity is high
- Need to address health disparities at the population level
- More than salary; it's population issues
- Health disparities and lack of maintenance care makes our patient panel very difficult LEADING to quicker burnout/stress



WHAT PROVIDERS WISHED OTHERS UNDERSTOOD

continued...

WE NEED TO GROW OUR OWN

- Need to support the ones who are homegrown rather than relying on coming from elsewhere
- Building STEM early in educational careers
- The most likely candidates to come back are the ones who were born and raised here
- Last class JABSOM had zero students from Hawai'i Island
- Disparity between the resources at our schools



OPPORTUNITY MIGHT BRING THEM HERE, BUT CONNECTION AND BELONGING MAKE THEM STAY

- Physicians are leaving to rejoin family on mainland
- Culture is harder to break into
- Outreach from the community would be helpful
- Integrating is difficult when you are not experienced in the local culture
- Connection to community; are you giving them the tools?
- Need to connect incoming residents to hobbies, sports, activities—get acclimated
- Support network; connection to community to help at personal level—feeling of being able to sustain in the community
- Finding ways to promote what is there for them in their personal lives



EXISTING SOLUTIONS

Click on the underlined responses below to access links to resources.

GRADUATE PROGRAMS

- [Physicians Assistants program in West Hawai'i](#)
- [AHEC Scholars 2-year program through Hilo Medical Center Foundation](#)
- [Nursing Program and DNP at UH Hilo](#)

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS (UH HILO STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS)

- [HOSA - Future Health Professionals](#)
 - Hui Kahu Mālama assists students with with MCAT prep textbooks, suture kits, med school applications, and interview preparation
 - HMC Foundation supports HOSA annually with registration, travel, and accommodations for HOSA State Conference
- American Medical Student Association
 - HMC Foundation supports members with mentoring, resume building, MCAT and interview prep, hands on clinical skills and Problem Based Learning (PBL) activities

AHEC PRE HEALTH CAREER CORP: K-12

Bulk of Pre Health Career is at high school level through the DOE Health Services Career Pathway. Currently there are 1,500 Hawai'i Island students enrolled in the Pre Health Career Corp that participate in mentoring, hands on clinical skills workshops, Teen Health Camps, Career Talks/Networking activities, job shadowing etcetera. All PHCC students receive a monthly newsletter with available program opportunities.



EXISTING SOLUTIONS continued...

Click on the [underlined](#) responses below to access links to resources.

POST-GRADUATE/RESIDENCY PROGRAMS

- [Rural health elective in internal medicine](#)
- [Area Health Education Center: Rural training track](#)
 - HMC Foundation serves as the AHEC for Hawai'i Island and provides assistance with clinical rotation coordination, housing, and on-island transportation for medical students from JABSOM and mainland medical schools for students with ties to Hawai'i. Rotation support is also available for resident physicians from O'ahu, behavioral health, physician assistants, APRNs etc.
- [Hawai'i Island Family Residency](#)
- Ali'i Health has pursued an affiliation agreement with JABSOM to encourage residents (medical school graduates) to do rotations at their clinic
- Maika'i Health: Academic Health Center. Clinic will not only provide a place for physicians to practice, but also provide quality care to address chronic disease

LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAMS

- [Link to resources here](#)



How can community members contribute to a solution?

Community members play a vital role in addressing the physician shortage. By getting involved, community members can help ensure that their community has access to the medical care it needs.

GROW OUR OWN

"The most likely candidates to come back are the ones who were born and raised here". Families can introduce children to health career options. Teachers and counselors can connect their students to Hilo Medical Center Foundation's Pre Health Career Corps, and we can all support schools (especially rural schools) by purchasing and donating equipment for health career exploration.

DECREASE ACUITY

Simply put, our providers are burning out because almost every patient comes in with multiple, chronic, and/or complex problems. Our community can help by encouraging family and friends to address healthcare concerns early and make healthy choices. Employers can change their workplace culture so folks don't feel guilty or fear losing hours because they need to request time off to see a doctor, and philanthropy can support social service programs that focus on prevention and early detection of health concerns.

PROVIDERS ARE PEOPLE TOO

Recruitment strategies need to appeal to the whole person, as well as their family. This includes meaningful work for their partners, schools where their children make friends, and opportunities for the whole family to connect with community, enjoy hobbies, and develop a sense of belonging to Hawai'i Island. We all play a part in reaching out as friends, coworkers, classmates, and neighbors.



What we can achieve if residents and institutions work together?

When residents and institutions work together, they can achieve significant progress in addressing the physician shortage. By building partnerships, promoting community engagement and supporting local initiatives, residents and institutions can help ensure a stronger and healthier community.

INCREASE THE ACCEPTANCE RATE OF HAWAI'I ISLAND STUDENTS INTO JABSOM.

Advocate for designation for Hawai'i island seats Advocate for designation for 'Imi Ho'ola seats Advocate for Hawai'i Island representation on the JABSOM medical school admissions committee Partner with schools on O'ahu with a high acceptance rate to learn how they are preparing students for testing and interview

ADVOCATE FOR A JABSOM SATELLITE CAMPUS ON HAWAI'I ISLAND

Hawaii island has the resource and infrastructure to be the logical choice for the first satellite JABSOM campus as UH Hilo is the only other 4-year university within the UH system that exists outside the island of Oahu. In addition, UHH already has a thriving nursing program, pharmacy school, health management degree focus, physical therapy pathway program, and health promotion degree option. A new model for primary care and rural health excellence, is Maika'i Health. This center will focus not only accessible, quality, outpatient primary care, but equally prioritize medical education and learning. A robust partnership with the UH system could result in a setting and environment in which a satellite JABSOM site can exist and succeed.

PARTICIPATE IN THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ANALYSIS

Community First, Hilo Medical Center Foundation, the County of Hawai'i, HMSA, Hawai'i State Rural Health Association, and the Office of Primary Care and Rural Health are conducting a multi-phase assessment of our community's access to on-island services for behavioral health, oral health, primary care, and medical specialists. Contact information for Hilo Medical Center Foundation and Community First is provided at the end of this report.



WHAT ARE YOUR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS?

Addressing the physician shortage requires a multifaceted approach that includes policy changes at the local, state and national levels. By implementing these policies, communities can take significant steps toward decreasing the burden of a physician shortage on Hawai'i island.

- 1** Review and update the insurance compensation and reimbursement structure to ensure fair and equitable reimbursement across all physicians regardless of the number of patients in their panel and longevity of practice.
- 2** Allocate monies for grants to support community initiatives, projects and DOE pathway programs to build the pipeline.
- 3** More money budgeted for each County (especially rural counties) to address healthcare (early prevention and detection):
Department of Health
- 4** GE Tax Exemption for Physicians.
[Click here for sample language.](#)





RESOURCES

Area Health Education Center <https://www.ahec.hawaii.edu/>

JABSOM Physician Shortage Report. January 2, 2021

<https://jabsom.hawaii.edu/report-finds-hawai%CA%BBi-physician-shortage-exacerbated-by-the-pandemic/>

The Perfect Storm 2021 Hawai'i Physician Shortage

<https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/post/big-islands-doctor-shortage-could-grow-72-percent-2030#stream/0>

2018 Hawai'i Community Health Needs Assessment

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5476c58ce4b0f2ef39513777/t/5c359cd14d7a9c3e50bac02f/1547017489758/2018-HAWAII-CHNA.pdf>

Ali'i Health Center | aliihealthcenter.com

Community Action Network | communityfirsthawaii.org/community-action-network

Community First | communityfirsthawaii.org

Hilo Medical Center Foundation | hilomedicalcenterfoundation.org

Hui Kahu Mālama | huikahumalama.org

Maika'i Health | maikaihealth.org

Pre Health Career Corps | hilomedicalcenterfoundation.org/projects/pre-health-career-corps

