Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders

Levers of Systemic Change for Advancing Health Equity

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Diverse Group of Nations and Peoples

- Populated the Pacific ~4,000 years ago.
  - ~300,000 square miles (800,000 square km).
  - ~25,000 islands and atolls.
- ~1,000 languages – 1/5 of all the world’s languages.
- 1.9 million people.
- Hawai’i is the 50th U.S. State.
- U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands:
  - U.S. territories of American Sāmoa and Guam.
  - The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), The Republic of Marshall Islands (FSM), and The Republic of Palau (RP).
- Compacts of Free Association – RP, FSM, and RMI.
Abundance to Occupation to Reclamation

Mohala i ka wai, ka maka o ka pua
“Flowers thrive where there is water, as thriving people are found where living conditions are good.”

• Pre-Western contact: Thriving communities and nations with relatively excellent health, abundant resources, and sophisticated forms of government and resource management.

• 1800s: Occupation by Britain, France, Spain, Imperial Japan, U.S.
  • Depopulation due to infectious diseases.
  • Christianization, exploitation of its people and resources, and development of commerce.
  • Immigration from Asian and European countries.

• 1893: U.S. supports the illegal overthrow of Hawai’i’s Sovereign and becomes the 50th State in 1959.

  • Led to displacement, inhabitable islands/atolls, environmental degradation, and cancer risk.

• 1986: COFA gives the U.S. exclusive military access to the region in exchange for building their health and education infrastructures and entry into the U.S. without visas.
  • The U.S. government has failed to fully live up to its obligations under COFA.
A Population on the Rise

- NHPI is a racial classification under OMB Directive 15.

- 1.6 million (0.5%) in the U.S.
  - 31% increase from 2010.

- Fast growing – doubling by 2050.
- Diaspora – high migration to the U.S.

- Strong cultural identity, community ties, and connections to Pacific island homes.

- Subjected to structural, systemic, institutional, and interpersonal oppression and racism.
The Adverse Health Effects of Structural and Systemic Oppression

Among NHPI...

- Racial oppression and racism associated with poorer self-reported health, depression, psychological distress, chronic diseases, & indices of physiological stress.

- Racial misclassification = poorer health.

- Historical loss = depression.

- Maltreatment and implicit biases found among health care providers.

- Mistrust toward medicine and science.

The Stanford Native community protesting the use of “Native” themes at campus frat parties in 2009.
The Major Structural and Systemic Issues

**Socio-cultural**
- False narratives.
- Historical, cultural, & language (near)loss – historical trauma.
- Diverse acculturation aspirations.
- Absence in media & popular culture, aside from sports.

**Socio-political**
- Decolonization & de-occupation.
- Hidden by data aggregation & exclusion from key national datasets.
- Near absence in politics & other leadership positions.
- Inequities in the justice system.
- Government investments in community infrastructure, education, science, & health.
- Citizenship and voting rights.

**Socio-economic**
- Obesogenic, toxic, & unsafe environments.
- Access to quality educational opportunities.
- Housing & houselessness.
- Delays in securing Hawaiian Homestead.
- Underfunding of federally-mandated Native Hawaiian Health Care System.
- Fulfilling the COFA treaties and promise of education and health care.

Sun rising over Haleakalā on Maui.
Cultural Resilience and Assets

- Revitalizing traditional values and practices (e.g., language; traditional diets and resource management; and ocean voyaging traditions).

- 93% of Native Hawaiians strongly identify with their Native Hawaiian heritage and culture (Kaholokula, 2017).

- 80% strongly believe it is important to maintain their unique cultural values and practices for psychological wellbeing (Kamehameha Schools, 2014).

- Despite more family adversity, Native Hawaiian adolescents report higher levels of family support, i.e., emotional support (Carlton et al., 2006).

- Culture-based educational strategies lead to better academic performance, cognitive and emotional engagement, education and community engagement, and greater cultural pride and sense of place (Kana'iaupuni & Ishibashi, 2003, 2005).

(Re)turning to our cultural traditions to improve our health and wellbeing.
Mahalo Nui