

Help us transform health care

The COVID-19 pandemic changed everything about our world, our economy, our education system and our personal and professional lives. One of the earliest lessons the pandemic revealed to us was how vital access to quality health care, close to home, is for the health of our community.

As we move forward together, we should hold on to the strength of grassroots connections in our local health care system, the ones that make us resilient in the face of adversity. And we also must seize the opportunity for transformation, to fix the gaps in access that the pandemic has made so plainly evident.

Community First, together with half a dozen health care, government and social services partners, has launched Access to Care, a project with a simple goal: to better understand what communities on Hawaii Island need to improve their health.

Access to Care is a comprehensive 360-degree health care assessment that combines data from resident



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surveys, input from health care and social service providers, and feedback from policymakers into a snapshot to better understand the terrain of the health care landscape on Hawaii Island.

Early results from the survey are providing an important window into where we are as a community. One respondent shared, “a high percentage of the homes I sell are older people moving back to the mainland to get adequate medical care. We are choosing between living where we love and staying alive.”

Another said, “I had two of my doctors leave or reduce their hours. My primary care doctor left so I’m being cared for by a nurse practitioner. My dermatologist has also reduced her office hours.”

Many respondents so far have pointed out an apparent shortage of doctors, including specialists, and the hardships that come with having to fly to Oahu or even out-of-state for care.

The vision of Access to Care is a community-focused health care collaborative that ensures everyone on Hawaii Island has timely access to quality health care, close to home.

Hawaii Island residents are encouraged to share their experience with the health care and social service systems via a simple, fast and 100% anonymous survey. Residents can also take the survey at pop-up events at participating grocery stores and farmers markets across the island throughout the month of November.

Everyone’s voice matters. When you fill out the survey, it’s a chance to call out the needs you see and the gaps you want fixed — for yourself, your family and your community. It’s a chance to get the resources your neighborhood, town,

district or community needs.

Survey results will be shared with policymakers, health care systems and social service providers so they can work together to streamline services, identify gaps in care and effect real change across the island.

Ultimately, the hope is that providers from across the island can work together to develop centers of excellence and increase their capacity to serve more patients locally, while residents feel empowered by their health care options and understand the benefits of local care.

As a mahalo, we’ll be giving out \$250 grocery gift cards via a randomized drawing in recognition of survey participation.

Take the survey, and add your voice to the stories that will shape health care on Hawaii Island for the future at www.accessstocarehawaii.org.

Randy Kurohara is executive director of Community First, a nonprofit that serves as a neutral forum for the community to come together and as a catalyst for solutions to improve health and lower medical costs on Hawaii Island