

Hawai'i Island perspectives shed light on a statewide care crisis

By Randy Kurohara

The [Access to Care](#) report was released last week - a unique health needs assessment study that looked at critical questions and key issues that impact local residents' ability to access the care they need across our communities, state-wide. The results show what Access to Care researcher Lisa Grove called "a tale of two Hawai'i's" - a story of stark differences that are often camouflaged by rosy national lists calling our home one of the healthiest, happiest, sunniest, or most fun places to live. According to the more than 3,000 community survey participants, there are demographics faring quite well in terms of their health, well-being, and access to the care they need. These folks are statistically most likely to be living in Honolulu or on O'ahu, over 55 years of age, and White or Japanese. But the picture is far less rosy for our communities on the neighbor islands, and in other racial and ethnic groups that include Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

It's no accident that the perspectives from our rural communities, neighbor islands and historically underrepresented demographics shine through in this data set. The study was funded by the Hawai'i State Department of Health Office of Primary Care and Rural Health as a part of the department's priority on health equity. Community First, the lead organization for this project, is based in Hilo - a rarity for large-scale statewide research initiatives that are so often run out of Honolulu. Community First convened partners including the Hawai'i State Rural Health Association, along with HMSA, the Hilo Medical Center Foundation, the Hawai'i Healthcare Association, the Pacific Basin Telehealth Resource Center, the Hawai'i Health Systems Corporation, among others. The hui worked with Lana'i-based research expert Lisa Grove to build a survey and focus groups that would get to the heart of what *all* of Hawai'i's people are struggling with in access to care - not just those with closest proximity to the usual powers-that-be.

Community First's Hawai'i Island-based leadership role in bringing together stakeholders and voices from across the state is a key reason why the data is so reliable, and the results so profound. Rooted in the local community here, the project team understands the importance of elevating those voices that are often ignored or passed over. Their voices - our voices - matter. And as our Access to Care project team continues to brief policymakers and healthcare leadership on their findings, we will continue to work to ensure those voices are heard.

Read the full report at www.accesstocarehawaii.org.

Randy Kurohara is the Executive Director of Community First, a 501 (c) 3 non-profit founded by the late Barry Taniguchi in 2014 to serve as a neutral forum for the community to come together, and as a catalyst for solutions to improve health and access to health care. Through its programs, Community First hopes to shift the model of healthcare from reactively treating disease, to proactively caring for the health of

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every person on Hawai'i Island. For more information, please visit our website at www.communityfirsthawaii.org or Facebook and Instagram pages at [@communityfirsthawaii](https://www.facebook.com/communityfirsthawaii).