

Participants Needed: A Journey to Find Health

By: Nicolas K. Los Banos, MA

We often hear about the strengthening of cultural sensitivity or cultural relevance in the world of health care. Many efforts have been made to make health care more accessible and relevant for culturally and linguistically diverse populations. However, these efforts often fall short. Studies indicate that populations like many of us here in Hawai'i--Native Hawaiians, other Pacific Islanders, and Asian populations--continue to have relatively lower healthcare utilization. Specifically, this refers to the low utilization of preventive forms of care such as routine healthcare provider visits. At the same time, acute and emergency forms of health care, like hospital emergency department visits, are often higher for these populations.

The effects that culture and society have on healthcare utilization have been studied from various angles. These studies continue to build the body of knowledge that intends to guide the development of better health care policies and improved access for all. Locally, Community First Hawai'i is adding to this body of knowledge by launching the Access to Care project which aims to better understand what our island community needs to improve health. Through this project, Community First Hawai'i surveyed over 3,200 residents and over 320 health care providers in 2022, with initial findings underscoring the challenges our communities face in accessing quality healthcare. Similarly, I am conducting a study to look at access from the perspective of patient and family learning.

As a doctorate of education candidate at Concordia University Wisconsin (online), I am adding to the body of knowledge around healthcare access through my dissertation study. My study is titled, He Huaka'i Imi Ola: A Case Study Exploring How Native Hawaiian Patients with Chronic Health Conditions Navigate the Healthcare System. Through this study, I am aiming to learn about the journey an individual takes from the time of diagnosis through the process of learning about their condition and intervention options, and ultimately, the selection of interventions. You may be familiar with chronic health conditions like heart disease or diabetes. For my study, I will be defining "chronic health conditions" broadly as what the CDC refers to as "conditions that last 1 year or more and require ongoing medical attention or limit activities of daily living or both."

Who can participate in this study? If you are 1) diagnosed with a chronic health condition for five or more years, and 2) receiving medical care from a healthcare provider, and 3) a resident of Hawai'i Island, then I invite you to take a quick online survey at <https://tinyurl.com/CUWhealthsurvey>. While my study is primarily focused on those of Native Hawaiian descent, I invite any Hawai'i Island residents who meet the three criteria above to participate. If you have questions about this study, you can reach me via email at nicolas.losbanos@cuw.edu or phone at 808-318-2772 extension 100. All survey and interview information related to this study will be confidential.

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In the end, my study will add another piece to the healthcare puzzle. In doing so, I hope to support what Community First Hawai'i is doing: working to shift our healthcare model from a reactive one to a proactive one that cares for the health of every person on Hawai'i Island.

Nic Los Banos is the Hawai'i Island Regional Coordinator for the Alzheimer's Association Aloha Chapter. He also serves through Community First as the co-chair of the Community Action Network, a member of the advance health care directive program committee, and as a program consultant to Community First's Path to Palliative Care initiative.