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Uninsured ‘Compact’ Citizens Impact Hawaii’s Healthcare System

In 2002, three of Hawaii’s hospitals (Queen’s, Straub, and Kapiolani) provided \$15 million in uncompensated services for Pacific Islanders, according to the Hawaii Health Survey conducted by the Healthcare Association of Hawaii. With hundreds of health care providers across the state, it is estimated that this \$15 million is just a small percentage of the total in uncompensated care provided to these citizens from the Compacts of Freely Associated States.

The 1996 Personal Responsibility & Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act eliminated eligibility of all legal immigrants for public assistance including Medicaid, a federally funded health care benefit. **As a result, taxpayers and the State of Hawaii underwrite the entire cost of QUEST and Medicaid fee-for-service health care.**

Thousands of Pacific Island citizens come to Hawaii as a result of the Compacts of Freely Associated States – international treaties that give foreign citizens certain rights such as: unrestricted entry to the U.S.; as well as access to residence, education, health care and employment.

Because of geographic proximity and cultural similarities, Hawaii continues to experience a significant influx of these citizens from:

- **Federated States of Micronesia.** Consists of four major island groups: Pohnpei, Chuuk, Yap and Kosrae.
- **Republic of the Marshall Islands.** Consists of two chains of 1,152 islands and 30 atolls, including Majuro (the capital); Ebeye Island, in Kwajalein Atoll; and Bikini and Enewetok atolls.
- **Republic of Palau.** Consists of six island groups totaling more than 200 islands.

“Compact migrants tend to be poor, have limited work skills, and face language and cultural barriers in Hawaii. They also come with a host of communicable diseases, notably Hansen’s disease, tuberculosis, hepatitis, and STDs,” according to Hawaii’s Special Needs, a September 2001 report. The report was prepared by the Statewide Strategic Projects initiative of the nonprofit Hawai’i Primary Care Association, which advocates for access to quality primary care.

“Although most Compact migrants come for economic opportunities, some also come specifically to get health care that is not available to them at home,” the report stated. “This includes people with chronic conditions, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and radiation-related illnesses, such as thyroid and other cancers.”

Some experts anticipate that the number of Compact citizens in Hawaii will continue to rise. Factors contributing to this increase include:

- a growing and aging population of Pacific Islanders
- high rates of infectious and chronic disease
- a continued lack of health resources in these Pacific Island nations.

The Hawai'i Uninsured Project has assembled a committee of health care providers and health coverage experts, along with representatives of Hawaii's congressional delegation and the federal government to explore this issue and develop possible solutions.

The Hawai'i Uninsured Project's mission is to ensure access to health coverage in Hawaii. The project is spearheading solutions through community collaboration and fact-based research. Support for the project is provided by grants from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Health Resources and Services Administration and local funders such as Hawaii State Department of Health and HMSA Foundation.



The Hawai'i Uninsured Project is a program of the Hawai'i Institute for Public Affairs (HIPA), an independent, nonpartisan and nonprofit organization dedicated to elevating Hawaii's public decision-making process through sound public policy analysis, research and community collaboration.

For more information on the institute, visit www.HipaOnline.com or call (808) 585-7931.