



February 2017

# Ola Lokahi

Creating a Healthy Hawaii Together

*The mission of the Department of Health is to protect and improve the health and environment for all people in Hawaii. We believe that an optimal state of physical, mental, social and environmental well-being is a right and responsibility of all of Hawaii's people.*

## Good Health! It's Everyone's Kuleana!

When it comes to health, the playing field is not even. There are many in our islands that do not enjoy good health because of their socioeconomic conditions or geographical location that prevent access to quality care and healthful living.

**Gov. David Ige** recognizes the need to address these disparities, so that more of Hawaii's people can experience good health.

"We are fortunate to live in Hawaii. By many measures, Hawaii is the healthiest state in the country, but we know that there is so much more we can do. There are diseases that impact our communities disproportionately...we can do a better job to get our community healthier and level the playing field."

Improving the health of Hawaii's people cannot be done solely by one individual or a single organization. It must be a shared responsibility.

The Hawaii State Department of Health has spearheaded a broad-based discussion among different stakeholders to develop a five-year strategic action plan.



***There are diseases that impact our communities disproportionately...we can do a better job to get our community healthier..." - Gov. David Ige***

### **A Year-Long Collaborative Process**

The strategic action plan was a collaborative process that took more than a year. It was a smart approach to maximize the state's limited resources and take advantage of the vast wealth of expertise available.

**Virginia Pressler, MD**, Director of the Hawaii State Department of Health, said the plan involved working program-to-program within the Department of Health, along with sister state agencies, such as the Department of Human Services and Department of Education.

The process also involved working with other community partners, such as UH School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene, UH Cancer Center, coun-

ty government programs, health plans, federally qualified community health centers, and nonprofit organizations, to build healthy communities throughout the state. "The focus was to look at the Department of Health and the Department of Human Services to determine how we can bring together the resources that each has to focus on families. We wanted to break down the silos so that we can do a better job as state government to provide the support the state needs," Gov. Ige said.

### **Creating a Culture of Health**

"We're enacting the Governor's vision for health by creating a culture of health throughout Hawaii. Creating a culture of health means

*(continued on page 2)*

# Good Health! It's Everyone's Kuleana!

*(continued from page 1)*

health and wellness is everyone's kuleana," Dr. Pressler said. "That means me, that means you, your family, your place of worship, your worksite, the community... Everyone needs to take health and wellness seriously and make it part of their agenda."

"Not only does it mean all of us taking our own responsibility for how we will influence health and wellness throughout the state, but it also means incorporating health as we set broad policies for transportation, education, environment, community development, and transit-oriented development. We need to look at all of these areas through the lens of how they will enhance health and wellness throughout the state," Dr. Pressler said.

## Addressing the Social Factors that Impact Our Health

"More and more research is showing us now that social issues -- the social determinants of health -- play a major role in our overall health and wellness. Only about 10 or 15 percent of our quality of life and length of life are affected by the care that we receive in a physician's office or hospital," she said.

"The majority of our health and wellness is influenced by our behaviors and our environment, where we live, whether we have walkable communities, are they safe for walking, is there easy access to healthy food, whether we have a roof over our head, if we have jobs, higher education -- all of these factors

contribute much more to our health and wellness than going to the doctor's office. This affirms that people's zip codes are more critical to their health than their genetic code."

## Three Priorities

Three major priority areas are outlined in the Department of Health's strategic action plan: 1) healthy babies and families, 2) integrating mental health and substance abuse screening into primary care, and 3) improving access to health using technology (telehealth).



*"The social determinants of health play a major role in our overall health and wellness." - Dr. Virginia Pressler*

## Babies and Families

The Department of Health has always had a Maternal and Child Health Branch under the Family Health Services Division, but under Gov. David Ige's administration, the Department of Health has been able to join forces with the Department of Human Services to create stronger collaborative partnerships to have a more powerful impact.

Although there is a national proven model of caring for two generations, Hawaii goes one step further by looking at ways to treat multiple generations as a family unit to take into account our unique social cul-

ture. The collaboration is a program called 'Ohana Nui, or extended family.

"We know that having healthy babies starts way before conception. We want to make sure that women of child-bearing age are having babies when they're ready to have babies, that they've thought it through. We want to make sure they are prepared socially, economically, and emotionally to have a healthy baby. It goes beyond ensuring a healthy baby and mother at birth; it involves taking care of the family

unit as a whole, especially in Hawaii where there are extended families," Dr. Pressler said.

A major federal Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) grant will support the Department of Health to integrate mental health screenings conducted on a regular basis by primary care physicians for depression and anxiety as well as substance abuse for people, including women of child-bearing age, since these factors can affect the overall health of child.

"We are now working with the Department of Human Services and

*(continued on page 3)*

# Good Health! It's Everyone's Kuleana!

*(continued from page 2)*

health plans to make regular mental health screenings a standard of care, so that every individual, from babies to adults, are being screened to make sure they receive appropriate interventions."

## Mental Health and Substance Abuse

"Mental health and substance abuse are probably the most undiagnosed areas in healthcare today. I'm pleased that one of the major health plans is now expecting to make screening for depression and anxiety part of their day-to-day standard of care for routine primary care visits," Dr. Pressler said. "This is a major step forward because depression and substance abuse are not only harmful in their own right, but also contribute to a lot of other chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes, and are related to domestic violence and adverse childhood experiences – negative experiences that are the result of poverty, substance abuse by parents, or domestic or child abuse that can affect children for life."

"By treating the whole family and identifying and addressing issues early on, the Department of Health can make a difference in the long term consequences that may affect the entire life course of an individual," Dr. Pressler added.

One of the major goals of the Department of Health last year was to start the process to build a new forensic hospital building. With the support of Hawaii's legislators and

the Governor's office, \$160 million was allocated for a new building to replace the now-demolished Goddard Building.

"It will be another four years before a new hospital facility is built, and in the meantime, we are rebuilding our community-based services that were cut back because of budgetary constraints during the Great Recession in 2008," Dr. Pressler said. "When we create more community services that allow mental health patients to receive the help they need and be stabilized, they may be less likely to develop the severe conditions that require hospital level care."

"Stabilizing involves providing the medications people need and surrounding them with social support services. This also helps to address the needs of our homeless who have chronic mental illness, but who may not need to be in a hospital. As we create the continuum of mental health care, fewer and fewer people will need to be in the hospital over time," she said.



## Telehealth

"Access to care in our island state is a challenge. We need to make better use of technology to improve access through telehealth," Dr. Pressler said.

By simply using a smart phone, we can improve access to primary care for older patients or those who are disabled and are homebound. For neighbor island residents in rural areas, the barriers to primary care and specialty care, including mental health, can be removed through telehealth, she said.

Telehealth also allows nursing, community care workers, social workers and other healthcare professionals to provide care remotely with the oversight of a physician to improve access to care for everyone. We've had telehealth for a number of years, but last year, Gov. Ige signed the telehealth law, so that healthcare providers can receive the same payment, whether that service is provided to patients during a face-to-face office visit or through telehealth.

"More and more people are recognizing how powerful telehealth is," said Dr. Pressler. "The Department of Health has a number of initiatives that are already underway. We already have success with teledentistry, telestroke, and telepsychology that we are using in our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division, and there are hospitals that want to use it to provide access for rural areas on the neighbor islands."

## Watch for Videos

You can view the Department of Health's strategic action plan at <http://health.hawaii.gov/opppd/> and watch for videos on the strategic plan that include interviews with Gov. David Ige and Department of Health leaders in the near future.