



# Ola Lokahi

Creating a Healthy Hawaii Together

**AUGUST 2017**

*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.*

## Hard Work Pays Off For DOH Medical Cannabis Registry and Dispensary Programs

In early August, Maui Grown Therapies received the green light from the Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) to begin sales of medical cannabis to registered patients and their caregivers on Maui. A few days later, DOH approved Aloha Green to begin sales to qualifying patients on Oahu. Both events were major milestones in the department's efforts to establish its expanded medical cannabis program with the actual start-up of retail sales through a regulated dispensary program.

Staff from the department's registry and dispensary programs, respectively, toiled many hours behind the scenes to make the historic moment a reality. On the registry side, the challenge was implementing an electronic system for physicians and advance practice registered nurses (APRNs) to register certified patients that balanced the requirements of the law while allowing patients access to their medicine.

DOH's Harm Reduction Services Branch officially took over the Medical Cannabis Registry Program from the Department of Public Safety (PSD) in January 2015. **Scottina "Scotty" Ruis, manager of the registry program**, and three other employees implemented the program. Scotty and her team worked to streamline the application process to reduce turnaround time for patients and their physicians and established protocols to allow law enforcement to verify the registration of patients and plants.

Scotty and her staff expanded the program's work space, developed its website and other communication strategies, hired and trained staff, transitioned the program from a paper to electronic application process, developed communication protocols with local, state and federal law enforcement, and conducted educational and

informational training sessions.

Scotty credited her "dream team" of dedicated workers who were willing to do whatever it took to get the work done and done right.

"We worked smart, strategized when we needed to and planned for what was expected down the road, Scotty said. "Everyone involved demonstrated a 'can-do' attitude that resulted in exemplary results. I'm very proud of the solid program that we've built together—from the transition from PSD to the implementation of a fully electronic system to the day-to-day operations, policies and procedures."

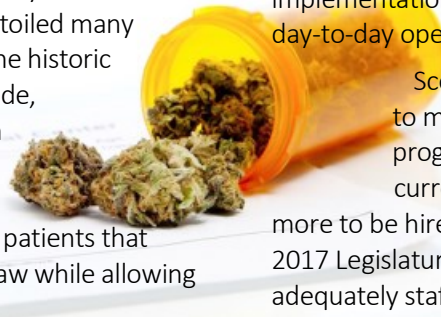
Scotty left her position in mid-August to move to another state but left the program in good hands. There are currently four staff members with two more to be hired (funds were appropriated by the 2017 Legislature) to ensure the program is adequately staffed as medical cannabis dispensaries become operational.

For the dispensary licensure program, which falls under DOH's Office of Health Care Assurance (OHCA), the goal is to make medical cannabis products readily available for registered patients while balancing the health and safety of patients and the public.

Initially, the dispensary program worked with the State Attorney General's Office in drafting the Hawaii Administrative Rules Chapter 11-850. OHCA staff, including branch and division chiefs, looked into other states' successes and challenges with medical cannabis.

**OHCA Chief Keith Ridley** said Hawaii learned from other states the need for a more detailed and structured regulatory environment that more clearly identifies the qualifications to apply for and possess a medical cannabis dispensary license.

*(continued on page 4)*



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# State Unveils Plan to Stop Spread of Rat Lungworm Disease

**G**ov. David Ige, together with DOH and the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA), recently announced the state's plans to prevent the spread of rat lungworm disease.

About a week after the announcement, DOH confirmed a new case of rat lungworm on Oahu, which brought the statewide total of confirmed cases to 16 for the year. It is also Oahu's first rat lungworm case since 2010.

"This is a serious disease that can be acquired on any of our islands because slugs and snails throughout the state carry the parasite responsible for the illness," said **Keith Kawaoka, deputy director of Environmental Health**. "This is a reminder that we all need to take precautions when working in our gardens and on farms, and eliminate slugs, snails and rats from our communities to reduce the risks posed by this parasitic disease."

DOH's increased efforts to prevent this disease include increasing public outreach and education throughout the state—a top initiative identified by the Governor's Rat Lungworm Disease Joint Task Force, which convened in 2016 and is comprised of local experts in medical, scientific, environmental, and public health fields from across the state.

The 2017 Hawaii State Legislature appropriated \$1 million over two years to DOH to improve rat lungworm disease response and prevention efforts. Funds will also be used to support two temporary full-time staff positions to coordinate prevention efforts between government and private sector partners.

"We appreciate the Legislature's



*DOH Director Dr. Virginia Pressler addresses the media along with Chairperson Scott Enright from the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (left) and Gov. David Ige.*

support in allowing the state to accelerate our efforts on this important initiative," said **DOH Director Dr. Virginia Pressler**. "The funds will provide much needed resources for our public health communications efforts as well as strengthen our disease investigation and vector control measures."

DOH will also work in partnership with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the University of Hawaii, HDOA and other agencies to conduct a targeted rat, slug and snail study to identify disease routes and provide data on risks from these vectors. Findings from the study will guide vector control activities for rat lungworm prevention.

The Joint Task Force is chaired by Dr. Kenton Kramer, associate professor from the Department of Tropical Medicine, Medical Microbiology and Pharmacology with the UH John A. Burns School of Medicine. Other members are from the Pacific Biosciences Research Center; the Daniel K. Inouye College of Pharmacy at UH-Hilo; HDOA's Plant Industry and Quality Assurance Divisions; USDA Agriculture Research Service; Kaiser Permanente Hawaii;

Hilo Medical Center; Kapiolani Medical Center for Women and Children; Hawaii County; and DOH's State Laboratories Division, District Health Offices of Hawaii Island, Maui and Kauai, Vector Control Branch, Safe Drinking Water Branch, Disease Outbreak Control Division, and Sanitation Branch.

## RAT LUNGWORM SYMPTOMS

Rat lungworm disease is caused by a parasitic roundworm called *Angiostrongylus cantonensis*. The parasite can be passed from the feces of infected rodents to snails, slugs and certain other animals, which become intermediate hosts for the parasite. People can become infected when consuming infected raw or undercooked intermediate hosts such as slugs, snails, freshwater prawns, frogs, crayfish and crabs.

Some infected people don't show symptoms or have mild symptoms. For others, the symptoms can be much more severe and include headaches, stiffness of the neck, tingling or pain on the skin or in extremities, low-grade fever, nausea, and vomiting. Sometimes, a temporary paralysis of the face may occur, as well as light sensitivity.

## PREVENTION TIPS

- Practice safe eating habits by inspecting, washing, and storing raw produce thoroughly regardless of where it came from, and/or cooking it properly to kill any parasites.
- Eliminate snails, slugs and rats—all of which are potential vectors for the disease—both around residential home gardens and agricultural operations of all scales.
- Prevent the consumption of snails and slugs by covering all containers, from water catchment tanks to drink and food dishes.

## Public Health Nurses Promote Proper Handwashing to Prevent Disease

The DOH Public Health Nursing Branch (PHNB) recently teamed up with the Hawaii Literacy Program to teach children at Mayor Wright Homes how to properly wash their hands to avoid getting or spreading germs.

After an initial hand wash, the children were given a solution to rub onto their hands and were instructed to wash once more and dry their hands. A special light was then used to detect residual germs.

“Proper handwashing and healthy hygiene practices are the most simple solutions to reducing the spread of germs,” says **Joan Takamori, Public Health Nursing Branch Chief.**

Using their relationships with schools and the community, Takamori and the Disease Outbreak Control Division launched an informal effort to promote proper handwashing, which is often overlooked in disease prevention efforts. PHNB also taught



*At the Hawaii Literacy Program in Mayor Wright Housing, Xavier Tuisea gets his hands checked for germs by volunteer kupuna Vicky Midado from the Foster Grandparents Program, while his uncle Sekone Fraser looks on.*

children at Kukui Gardens about proper handwashing and are planning future demonstrations at public housing projects.

With the start of the new school year, public health nurses are working with 256 school health assistants from the State Department of Education (DOE) to promote the message of getting vaccinated, proper handwashing, healthy hygiene habits such as coughing in a tissue or your

arm, and staying home when sick. PHNB held a similar demonstration with the DOE Community Children’s Council. Their staff in turn took the message to their school communities and taught leaders in Summer Fun programs, who then taught it to younger children.

“We want to promote a culture of health by teaching people how to minimize the spread of disease,” Joan said. “Imagine if we change the behavior of our youth so that it becomes automatic to properly wash their hands and to teach others they come into contact with. We hope it goes beyond proper handwashing to include vaccinations and overall healthy hygiene habits that last for a lifetime.”



*Joan Takamori*

## Developmental Disabilities Division Launches New CLS Program

The Department of Health’s Developmental Disabilities Division (DDD) has announced the launch of Community Learning Services (CLS)—a new initiative that enables Medicaid beneficiaries to actively explore and engage in chosen community activities and social roles, rather than remain in segregated settings or isolation at home.

DDD is rolling out CLS a year after it received approval from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to amend the I/DD waiver authorized in Section 1915(c) of the Social Security Act for individuals with developmental or intellectual disabilities. CLS will replace Personal Assistance Habitation (PAB) in the



*Mary Brogan*

community and Adult Day Health (ADH) group outings. The following services are now offered through the I/DD waiver: adult day health, discovery and career planning, individual employment support, PAB, residential rehabilitation, respite, skilled nursing, additional residential support, assistive technology, chore, community learning services, environmental accessibility adaptations, non-medical transportation, personal emergency response system, specialized medical equipment and supplies, training and

consultation, vehicular modifications and waiver emergency services.

“CLS will help people with disabilities explore their interests and be a part of the community,” said **Mary Brogan, DDD chief.** “They have rights to access the community just like everyone else. They can join organizations or clubs with others who like to do the same things, gain new experiences, develop new skills by volunteering or taking classes, attend sporting or cultural events, vote and participate in the legislative process.”

Those interested in CLS should discuss this with their case manager. More details are available by calling DDD at (808) 586-5842 or emailing [mary.brogan@doh.hawaii.gov](mailto:mary.brogan@doh.hawaii.gov).

## DOH Medical Cannabis Registry and Dispensary Programs *(continued from page 1)*

“These include background checks on applicants and dispensary employees, physical security requirements such as a secure building and security cameras, and tracking of cannabis throughout the cultivation, harvesting, manufacturing, testing, transportation and sales processes,” Keith said. “The need for independent laboratory testing was another lesson learned to ensure patient and product safety, especially when patients are already dealing with chronic health conditions and at risk for illnesses from impurities.”

**Dr. Chris Whelen, chief of DOH’s State Laboratories Division**, and his staff are

actively working to ensure that independent private laboratories meet certification standards to test medical cannabis and medical cannabis products for potency, specific impurities and contaminants. He and a staff of up to eight chemists, microbiologists and certification officers are heavily involved in reviewing data and conducting on-site laboratory visits.

“It’s a big job since it’s a new area of laboratory science and there are no federal guidelines on how to dispense the product,” said Dr. Whelen. “Coming up with standards in the absence of federal guidelines and assisting laboratories in

meeting those standards is an on-going challenge.”

To date, the State Laboratories Division has provisionally certified one of three applicants and is actively communicating with the other two as they prepare for certification as well.

**DOH Director Dr. Virginia Pressler** is proud of the work of both the registry and dispensary programs.

“Implementing a new program is always challenging but our team has paved the way for our medical cannabis program and set a new standard for other states to emulate,” she said.

## EMS & Injury Prevention Branch Hosts Ocean Safety Conference

**O**cean safety and the role of lifeguards in Hawaii over the past century were at forefront of the 2017 Drowning Prevention & Ocean Safety Conference sponsored by the Hawaii Department of Health, City & County of Honolulu and the Hawaii Tourism Authority.

Hundreds attended the two-day conference and evening receptions held July 27-28 at the Hawaii Convention Center. The event brought together county ocean safety, public health, emergency medical/trauma, and visitor industry officials for high quality education and discussion on drowning and injury prevention strategies.

According to statistics from DOH’s EMS and Injury Prevention Branch, drowning is the fourth leading cause of unintentional injury death in the state and the leading cause of death to

Hawaii’s visitors. **Drowning and Spinal Cord Injury Prevention Coordinator**

**Bridget Velasco** said the 75 fatal drowning deaths that occur each year in Hawaii could be reduced significantly if the public would remember to swim only at beaches with lifeguards, use a buddy system, pay attention to warning signs, respect the ocean more and know their limits.



*Bridget Velasco*

“It’s also important to learn how to swim, to duck dive under waves with arms outstretched in front of the head to avoid spinal cord injuries, and to use common sense when taking selfies and other photos anywhere near the water,” Bridget said.

Conference keynote speaker Nainoa Thompson, master navigator and president of the Polynesian Voyaging Society, discussed the relationship between the Hokulea’s three-year voyage and the 100th Year anniversary of lifeguards and their contributions to Hawaii. Other topics included the impacts of global warming, maintenance initiatives at Waikiki Beach and updates on the 2017 hurricane season by the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

As a result of the conference, ocean safety experts and others formulated strategies on ways to enhance data collection, improve communication between agencies and educate legislators on the importance of lifeguards for the prevention of injuries and death at beaches.



*County ocean water safety officials and partners pose for a group photo after two days of education and collaboration at the 2017 Hawaii State Drowning Prevention and Ocean Safety Conference sponsored by the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, Hawaii Tourism Authority, City & County of Honolulu and Hawaii Department of Health.*

## DOH Co-Hosts Job Fair For Prospective Employees

Attention DOH employees—if your friends or family members are considering a new job or career opportunity, the Department of Health may have just what they're looking for! A number of positions are currently open at DOH which co-hosted a free job fair with two other state departments at the Hawaii State Capitol on August 11, 2017.

“We offer a number of rewarding career opportunities in public service,” said **Ian Greene, chief of the DOH Human Resources Office Recruitment and Examination.** “If you are a job seeker, the Hawaii Department of Health may be the perfect place for you. The work we do is very challenging and powerful. Every day we make a difference in the lives of the people of Hawaii.”

Go online to: <http://health.hawaii.gov/employment/job-opportunities/> to view a listing of available positions at DOH. To view a list of civil service job opportunities at other state departments and to fill out an online application, go to the State Recruiting Office's website at <http://dhrd.hawaii.gov/job-seekers/>.



(left to right): Ian Greene with Deanne Watanabe, Rene Tokunaga, Maddie Ledda, and Wendy Nagano from the Developmental Disabilities Division.

Ian said the job fair was a big success and thanked the many employees from various DOH divisions and branches who volunteered to staff the informational display tables.

## New Worksite Wellness Program Kicks Off at DOH

To support the health and well-being of employees, DOH is introducing its Worksite Wellness (WSW) Program, Start Living Healthy@Work, which implements worksite strategies to help employees get engaged in their own well-being.

The goal, according to **DOH Director Dr. Virginia Pressler,** is to establish a “culture of health” by removing barriers, providing opportunities and influencing employees to adopt healthy behaviors.

Start Living Healthy@Work reflects the guiding principles of the Department of Human Resources Development Worksite Wellness Policy, which encourages state agencies to create and maintain worksite wellness initiatives for their employees to adapt healthier lifestyles and lower their risk for developing chronic diseases and conditions like type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Key components of the Start

Living Healthy@Work program include:

- ❖ Collaborating with HMSA and Kaiser Permanente to leverage health promotion and well-being benefits and wellness programming resources.
- ❖ Implementing strategies that support and encourage employees to be physically active, eat healthy, and reduce tobacco use.
- ❖ Establishing a Wellness Committee to engage the department's workforce.

“Worksite wellness programs can create environmental and systemic change to make the healthy choices the easy choice, and improve the physical, mental, and emotional health of employees,” said **Lloyd Kishi, DOH Worksite Wellness Coordinator.**

In addition to a department-wide effort to promote the benefits of well-being to DOH employees, several

divisions, offices, and attached agencies have made the commitment with designated Wellness Champions to participate in the Start Living Healthy@Work program.



Lloyd Kishi

“We are hoping to reach employees at every level, and support their efforts to make positive lifestyle choices,” said Lloyd.

The launch of Start Living Healthy@Work will begin by assessing the health promotion priorities and interests of DOH employees. Stay tuned to hear more about exciting Start Living Healthy@Work wellness activities, including how you can participate.

For more information about the Wellness Program, email Lloyd at [lloyd.kishi@doh.hawaii.com](mailto:lloyd.kishi@doh.hawaii.com).