



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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March is National Brain Injury Awareness Month *Events on Oahu focus on survivor stories and prevention*

HONOLULU – Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a major cause of death and disability in the U.S. Nationally, about 1.7 million people sustain a TBI each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Survivors face serious effects such as impaired thinking, memory, movement and sensation or emotional functioning that can last a few days or for the rest of their lives.

An estimated 13,500 individuals in Hawai'i sustained a TBI each year between 2012 and 2016, according to the Hawaii Health Information Corporation. The leading causes of TBI are falls, motor vehicle accidents, violence and sports injuries.

To increase public awareness of the effects of TBIs, resources available to survivors, and ways to prevent these serious and life-changing injuries, the DOH Developmental Disabilities Division (DDD) Neurotrauma Supports program is teaming up with its partners in the community for events during National Brain Injury Awareness Month in March.

On March 2, a special exhibit of the "Unmasking Brain Injury Project" was opened to the public at the Rehabilitation Hospital of the Pacific located at 26 N. Kuakini St. The project will be on display through March 8 between the hours of 7 a.m. and 8 p.m. daily.

The Unmasking Brain Injury Project is a national initiative that allows survivors to tell their stories through the design of three-dimensional artistic masks that are reflective of their experience of having a TBI. The art works are beautiful and striking portrayals of the emotions and feelings survivors have experienced from their personal journeys. The goal of this project is to raise public awareness about the prevalence and impacts of TBI and to give survivors a voice and a creative outlet to educate others about what it's like to live with a TBI. Individuals living with a disability due to brain injury are like anyone else, deserving of respect, dignity, compassion, and the opportunity to prove their value in their communities.

"Brain injury is a hidden disability, often leaving no physical indication of injury but having a significant effect on survivors' daily activities and interactions with others," said Mary Brogan, DOH Developmental Disabilities Division administrator. "No two injuries are exactly the same, and the lifelong challenges that survivors face are unique. "Our hope is that this project will allow others to better understand the experiences of survivors of TBI, as well as the hope and resilience survivors demonstrate each day."

From March 10-15, the Unmasking Brain Injury Project exhibit will be on display at Pearlridge Center Downtown.

From March 16 – April 2, the artworks will be on display at the Hawai'i State Capitol chamber level.

On Saturday, March 17 at 1 p.m., a free showing of a movie about concussions starring Will Smith will be presented at the John A. Burns School of Medicine Medical Education Building located at 651 Ilalo Street. The movie brings awareness of the need for prevention efforts surrounding brain injury and the long-term effects of TBI. Prior to the showing, health care providers from Queen's Medical Center will speak about concussions and traumatic brain injuries. There will also be free popcorn, a trivia contest and prizes. For more information, contact the Pacific Disabilities Center at (808) 692-1370 or <http://pdc.jabsom.hawaii.edu>.

On Wednesday, March 21, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., multi-sport helmets will be offered free to the first 300 students at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa Campus Center on a first-come, first-served basis. Students will also receive information on preventing traumatic brain injuries and tips on the proper use of helmets. Using a helmet can reduce the risk of serious brain injury and death due to a fall or collision because the helmet, rather than a person's head, will absorb most of the impact.

The DOH Neurotrauma Supports program addresses the needs of people with neurotrauma injury and their families. The program also encourages people to learn about brain injuries and how to prevent them. Simple prevention techniques to avoid traumatic brain injuries include:

- Properly using helmets and other protective equipment, and safe playing techniques in sports and recreational activities;
- Properly installing and using infant and child car seats and seat belts;
- Eliminating trip hazards at home for seniors and the elderly by regularly reviewing medications and having annual eye exams. Regular exercise is also recommended to help older adults maintain and improve their balance and coordination to prevent falls.

For additional information on resources for individuals with traumatic brain injury, please call the Neurotrauma Helpline at (808) 733-2155 or visit the Neurotrauma Supports website at <http://health.hawaii.gov/nt/>.

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