



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Hawai'i to receive more than 500 healthcare surge staff workers for hospitals statewide

Hawai'i Department of Health, Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency and Healthcare Association of Hawai'i tap into Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Funding

HONOLULU — More than 500 experienced healthcare professionals from out of state will be deployed to 19 hospitals statewide in the coming weeks with funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Hawai'i will receive \$46 million in federal funding to bring in traveling healthcare workers through staffing services from ProLink Healthcare.

This past weekend, 46 clinicians were deployed to Hilo Medical Center and Kona Hospital on Hawai'i Island to accommodate the increased need as a result of the surge in COVID-19 cases. The remaining staff are expected to arrive in Hawai'i and be deployed over the next three weeks. They are expected to work in Hawai'i for eight weeks each.

This is the second time during the pandemic that Hawai'i has received surge staff support. Last September, the Hawai'i Department of Health in collaboration with the Healthcare Association of Hawai'i, secured \$14 million in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds to bring in 140 traveler staff for hospitals, and secured another \$3 million to bring in 70 healthcare staff to assist long-term care providers.

In the first round of staffing last fall, more than 200 out-of-state nurses and other specialists were deployed to hospitals over a four-month period to supplement local hospital staff. Dr. Elizabeth Char, director of the Department of Health, served as lead medical advisor on the initial contract with ProLink Healthcare, a Cincinnati, Ohio-based healthcare staffing company. The earlier contract with ProLink has been extended to meet the current medical surge staffing needs.

"In anticipation of the need for increased hospital staffing, Department of Health began to work with the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency to obtain emergency funding from FEMA," Dr. Char said. "The collaboration and teamwork with HI-EMA and the Healthcare Association of Hawai'i allowed us to bring this to fruition in less than a month."

“With the delta variant causing a surge in cases across the nation, working together as a group improved our opportunities to obtain the funding Hawai‘i needs,” said Luke Meyers, administrator of the Hawai‘i Emergency Management Agency. “This approach also ensures smaller, rural hospitals, especially those on the neighbor islands, can receive the support they need and are not overlooked to ensure equitable healthcare access for all Hawai‘i residents.”

“The needs in the hospitals have dramatically increased primarily because of the highly transmissible delta variant. Our emergency rooms, medical-surge units and intensive care units are being overwhelmed with patients who have not been vaccinated,” said Hilton Raethel, CEO of the Healthcare Association of Hawai‘i. “Access to staffing resources is critically important for all of the acute facilities to improve access to care. The speed at which this has come together has been outstanding, and we are grateful for the continued partnerships.”

Specialized personnel will augment local healthcare staff at Kuakini Medical Center, The Queen’s Medical Center (in Honolulu, West O‘ahu, Molokai General, and North Hawai‘i), Adventist Health Castle, Hilo Medical Center, Hale Ho‘ola Hamakua, Kona Community Hospital, Maui Memorial Medical Center, Wahiawa General, Kaiser Permanente Moanalua Medical Center, Straub Medical Center, Kapiolani Medical Center for Women and Children, Pali Momi Medical Center, Wilcox Hospital, Kaua‘i Veterans Memorial Hospital, Samuel Mahelona Medical Center, and Hawai‘i State Hospital.

The majority of the positions are for medical-surgical nurses, critical care nurses, and telemetry nurses. The remaining positions include respiratory therapists, emergency department nurses, medical technicians, and behavioral health clinicians. The breakdown includes 150 critical care nurses, 184 telemetry nurses, 94 medical-surgical nurses, 37 respiratory therapists, 71 emergency department nurses, and other health care professionals.

All of the out-of-state healthcare staff are required to show verification that they are fully vaccinated or be tested for COVID-19 on a regular basis.

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