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CDC report highlights Hawai'i effort to address COVID-19 health disparities through improving data

HONOLULU – A new U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report authored by Hawai'i researchers demonstrates the value of separating public health data in order to identify and address racial disparities.

Data collected by the Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) revealed racial disparities in COVID-19 infections and death. Race and ethnicity can serve as markers for underlying systemic and structural inequities that drive health disparities. This data informed DOH's COVID-19 response and emphasized the need to prevent and reduce inequities in social determinants of health, access to health care, and health conditions. [Click here to read the report.](#)

"These findings demonstrate the importance of collecting and disaggregating data to more effectively address health disparities," said Dr. Joshua Quint, DOH Epidemiologist and primary author. "We are thankful for our community partners who have worked hand-in-hand with DOH in our health equity efforts and we are committed to continuing to make data available to improve health outcomes."

The Hawai'i data was published in CDC's [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report \(MMWR\)](#), a national weekly journal highlighting public health information and recommendations. Authors include researchers from DOH, the University of Hawai'i and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

Data from Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and Asian populations are often combined into one group in studies, which can hide important differences between these communities. By separating COVID-19 infection and mortality data into more detailed racial subgroups, the report highlights large disparities in COVID-19 case and death rates among Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Asian communities.

Rates of infection and death were highest among Pacific Islander populations. Additionally, researchers found that among Asian populations, infection rates were highest among the Filipino and Vietnamese populations. Data included in the analysis was collected between

March 1, 2020 and Feb. 28, 2021, but DOH continues to collect and report disaggregated infection and mortality data.

The data allowed DOH to improve its community response, which included the creation of the Pacific Islander Priority Investigations and Outreach Team and the COVID-19 Outreach and Public Health Education project to provide translated prevention information, improved access to resources, and support community outreach. These efforts complemented grassroots initiatives within Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and Filipino communities.

The MMWR article follows the March release of the DOH's ["COVID-19 in Hawai'i: Addressing Health Equity in Diverse Populations"](#) report.

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