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**Financial recovery, permanent housing identified as greatest needs
for Lāhainā communities**

HONOLULU – An assessment conducted by the Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) identified the greatest needs of Lāhainā residents affected by the wildfires and evaluated the impact on their physical and mental health.

“The needs assessment provided a critical opportunity for the affected communities to voice current needs and concerns,” said Deputy State Epidemiologist Dr. Nathan Tan. “We thank all participants for their time and mana'o. We connected 64 households with services during the assessment and are now working with response partners to address identified issues as recovery work continues.”

The greatest needs identified by the community included financial recovery (26%), finding permanent residence (24%), and finding employment (9%). Respondents applied to an average of four assistance programs and the majority were approved or had applications pending at the time of the survey. However, half of households reported being denied by at least one assistance program.

Fifty-six percent of households are still in non-congregate shelters and hotels or are doubled up with family or friends. Despite ongoing uncertainty in finding permanent housing, 78% of respondents reported that all of their household members remain on Maui.

The assessment also highlighted ongoing impacts on physical well-being. Forty-one percent of survey respondents reported a decline in a household member's health.

When asked to explain how their household's health has worsened since the wildfires, many households reported a combination of increased anxiety, stress, and impaired sleep resulting in a decline in their physical health. The other most common reasons cited included respiratory issues related to smoke inhalation and feeling unwell due to dietary changes or decline in physical activity.

Sixty-eight percent reported that all or some household members are experiencing impaired sleep, while 72% percent reported at least one household member experiencing nervousness, anxiety, or depression in the two weeks before the assessment was conducted.

Despite how the wildfires have affected residents' mental and physical well-being, 82% of surveyed households felt they could access medical care if needed. Community members are increasingly using mental health support services and the majority (80%) reported that they know where to seek those services if needed.

Five hundred and sixty-five households were randomly selected from a list of applicants for federal assistance and were contacted via phone to answer a voluntary questionnaire between October 9 and October 11, 2023. Of the households contacted, a total of 228 interviews were completed.

DOH is working with program leaders as well as with external partners to develop recommendations to address the issues identified by this needs assessment.

The Maui Wildfires Public Health Rapid Needs Assessment Report is available here: <https://health.hawaii.gov/news/files/2023/10/Maui-Wildfire-RNA-Preliminary-Report.pdf>

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