



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
*KA MOKU 'ĀINA O HAWAII*

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
GOVERNOR  
*KE KIA'ĀINA*

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
*KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO*

**KENNETH S. FINK, M.D., MGA, MPH**  
DIRECTOR  
*KA LUNA HO'OKELE*

**HAWAII LIFE EXPECTANCY DECLINED LESS THAN  
NATIONAL AVERAGE DURING COVID-19**

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HONOLULU — While life expectancy across the United States declined significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, a new study led by researchers at the University of Hawai'i [Thompson School of Social Work & Public Health](#) and the [Hawai'i State Department of Health](#) found that Hawai'i experienced a smaller decline compared to national trends.

Drs. [Yan Yan Wu](#), [Michael Phillips](#), and [Kathryn L. Braun](#) from the University of Hawai'i [Department of Public Health Sciences](#) and Dr. Lance Ching and Claire Prieto from the Department of Health [Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Division](#), found that life expectancy in Hawai'i declined by 1.4 years, from 82.1 in 2019 to 80.7 in 2021. Nationwide, the decline over the same period was 2.4 years, from 78.8 to 76.4. Their findings were published in the [Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health](#).

“The smaller magnitude and delayed timing of Hawai‘i’s decline may reflect the state’s geographic isolation and early implementation of public health interventions,” said Dr. Wu, the study’s lead author. “In 2022, life expectancy partially rebounded by 0.5 years in Hawai‘i and by 0.9 years nationally, with Hawai‘i remaining about four years higher than the U.S. average throughout the pandemic.”

“Hawai‘i ranks among the top U.S. states for COVID-19 vaccination coverage. By May 2023, data reported by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed that more than 90% of residents received at least one dose and more than 80% were considered fully vaccinated with the primary COVID-19 vaccine series,” said Dr. Ching, epidemiologist with the DOH Chronic Disease Prevention & Health Promotion Division. “These high vaccination levels—reached over the course of the pandemic—helped delay the peak of COVID-19 mortality in Hawai‘i by approximately six months compared to the national average and contributed to the state’s distinction of having the lowest age-adjusted COVID-19 death rate in the country.”

### **Key findings**

- Life expectancy in Hawai‘i remained stable from 2018 to 2020 (82.3, 82.1, and 82.0 years, respectively).
- A decline occurred in 2021 to 80.7 years, followed by a partial rebound to 81.2 years in 2022.
- Among males, life expectancy fell from 79.2 years in 2018 to 77.5 years in 2021, then rose to 78.2 years in 2022.
- Among females, life expectancy fell from 85.4 years in 2018 to 84.0 years in 2021, rebounding to 84.4 years in 2022.
- The gap between female and male life expectancy widened to 6.5 years in 2021 before narrowing to 6.2 years in 2022—the same as in 2019.

Despite these fluctuations, Hawai‘i’s overall decline in life expectancy remained less severe than the U.S. average throughout the pandemic.

### **Policy implications**

The researchers note that Hawai‘i’s better outcomes underscore the effectiveness of early public health interventions, strong community engagement, and high vaccine uptake. They recommend that future policies build on these strengths by investing in rapid-response infrastructure and maintaining high vaccination coverage to better protect vulnerable communities during future disease outbreaks.

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**Media contact(s):**

Gail Ogawa  
Program Specialist  
Hawai'i State Department of Health  
Office: 808-586-4526  
Email: [gail.ogawa@doh.hawaii.gov](mailto:gail.ogawa@doh.hawaii.gov)

Adam LeFebvre  
Information Specialist  
Hawai'i State Department of Health  
Phone: 808-586-4439  
Email: [adam.lefebvre@doh.hawaii.gov](mailto:adam.lefebvre@doh.hawaii.gov)