

**ADDRESSING DISPARITIES IN THE HEALTHCARE FIELD
TOWARDS NATIVE HAWAIIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS**

BY MINAL GOWDA AND BELEN SIME

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The American healthcare system is far beyond flawed, which we are already well aware of. Not only is there a lack of proper support for minority groups to acquire healthcare, but there is also a lack of representation for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color) as providers and leaders in the career side of healthcare. The discrimination that causes this doesn't just start from the healthcare employment process; it begins well before then. There are various disparities in the education system that withhold minority groups, such as Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NH/PI), from succeeding in the healthcare field.

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) reports that only 941 physicians identified as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders out of the 918,547 registered in the U.S. in 2018. To put that into perspective, if you had a jar filled with 1,000 jelly beans, a single one would account for the 0.1% of NH/PI that make up America's physician population. This marginalization is important to voice because of how important representation is: it influences the future generations of N.H./PIs aspiring to be in positions of power and leadership in the the medical field sets the societal standard for what those people can or can't do. There are also other implications that come with these disparities, which Stanford medical student Kekoa Taparra speaks out in an interview with a Stanford medical school blog: "... racially and ethnically concordant physicians can improve patient health outcomes by building strong doctor-physician relationships in marginalized communities that may otherwise have distrust for the medical system." Not having enough representation for communities such as Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders can lead to poor care for patients of the same descent because of the reasons Taparra mentions. Addressing the root cause of problems that eventually lead to the disempowerment of Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders joining the healthcare career field is crucial, and it starts with education. We've all heard how hard it is to get into medical school, but what you probably didn't know is that it is significantly harder for N.H./PIs to achieve. The AAMC's public data shows that in the 2023-2024 academic year, Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders had the lowest percentage of acceptance rates to medical schools, coming in at 36% in comparison to most other racial/ethnic groups in the mid to high 40s. In fact, only 7.4% of N.H./PIs have obtained professional/graduate degrees, whereas whites have nearly double the percentage. This further proves that educational disparities remain prevalent when it comes to minority groups like N.H./PIs, which is a huge cause of the disparities in healthcare representation.

It is crucial that we must implement strategies in order to fight back against these education disparities. As a community, we must challenge these societal standards that limit certain groups from success. Some of the initiatives that have been put into action so far include the establishment of community health centers and programs at medical schools devoted to fighting against a single cause. For instance, AAPCHO (The Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations) is an organization that promotes "advocacy, collaboration, and leadership to improve the health of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders." The organization has been active for five years, implementing community-based initiatives to improve the health of NH/PI communities and providing opportunities for them to gain medical knowledge. Additionally, medical schools are working to support students from underserved backgrounds. U.W. Medicine works closely with WWAMI AHEC (Areas Health Education Center) to enhance the quality and distribution of healthcare professionals. Another similar program is found at the University of Hawaii known as 'Imi Ho'ōla (Hawaiian for "those whose seek to heal") which fosters a pathway for Pacific Islander pre-med students. Through initiatives like these, we can empower students from minority groups to follow their passion but worry less about their race being held against them. It's no surprise that we need to continue addressing these disparities. Professor Kehaulani Vaughn,

Assistant Director of the Asian American Resource Center at Pomona College, emphasizes the need for API studies, connecting with students and youth to show them that higher education is for everyone: "We need to make these connections for our students, for our youth that says higher education is a place for you". Since youth are our future leaders, we must begin by empowering younger students, especially

WEEKLY QUESTION: How does historical trauma and colonization continue to affect the health and well-being of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities?

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those from underrepresented groups, so we can show them that they can achieve great things. The lack of representation that is prominent to Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders in the healthcare field will only get better once we start advocating for the problem and continue taking initiative. There's still much more to do, and we must aim for change.

References:

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<https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/workforce/data/figure-18percentage-all-active-physicians-race/ethnicity-2018>

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<https://nam.edu/challenges-and-promise-of-health-equity-for-native-hawaiians/>

<https://www.shemmassianconsulting.com/blog/medical-school-acceptance-rates-by-race>

<https://aapcho.org/>

<https://scopeblog.stanford.edu/2021/10/25/qa-native-hawaiian-resident-shines-light-on-health-disparities/>

SPEAKER THIS WEEK

Speaker [Sili Savusa](#), Executive Director, Pacific Islander Community Association of Washington:

“Making Connections Beyond Conversations”

Wednesday
12:00PM
ZOOM

Prize from Emails
Announced every Friday!