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Disparities in health and healthcare are prevalent in Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities. These groups are more likely to contract STDs, catch Covid-19, suffer a stroke, and more. In addition, NHPI populations are 80% more likely to be obese and 2.5 times more likely to have diabetes than white Americans. Obesity is a global endemic and affects millions worldwide, as does diabetes.

There is more to diabetes than what meets the eye. When analyzing diabetes, it is essential to recognize that the disease is classified into two major types: Type 1 and Type 2. Although the two types follow a similar structure, they have different causes. Type 1 is genetic and shows up early in life, whereas Type 2 is related to one's lifestyle and develops over time. Therefore, the prevalence of diabetes in NHPI populations has to be analyzed by type to understand the causes of the disparities. While it may seem like a noticeable disparity, many past surveys have often grouped NHPI into a general pan-Asian category, obscuring these results.

Although Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians have statistically much higher rates of diabetes than their white counterparts, not much has been done to address the problem. One reason could be that, unlike pandemics like COVID-19, diabetes can't be cured or vaccinated, making it much harder to control its spread. A 2018 survey by the CDC reveals that 19.8% of NHPI respondents have diabetes compared to 8.6% of white respondents, a 250% difference. Furthermore, having a parent with diabetes can massively increase a child's risk of diabetes by up to 30-70%. While genetics may play a role in the diabetes incidence rate, there are certainly health disparities common in NHPI communities that affect these statistics.

Obesity, diet, lifestyle, and more all play a significant role in developing Type 2 diabetes, disproportionately hitting NHPI communities more than other ethnicities. In many Pacific Islander cultures, obesity denotes high status and wealth, and Pacific Islander youth see obesity as acceptable and desirable. In a CDC-presented podcast, Dofi Faasou, a Pacific Islander living in Utah, describes how many NHPI cultures emphasize eating and fail to warn people about the effects of diabetes. "My people have got to know that life's too short, and they are only cutting it short if they do not watch out what they eat and do not exercise," she says. The problem of obesity in NHPI cultures leads to a higher prevalence of diabetes. Without a healthy lifestyle, Pacific Islanders in the US are more likely to develop diabetes and potentially worsen their condition.

A final compounding factor is how minorities experience significantly lower access to treatment. Healthcare is expensive, and among other Asian American subgroups, NHPI communities have the lowest insured rates. Language and cultural barriers may also discourage people from seeking care. This pseudo-isolation can deter people from seeking treatment and cause severe damage to the health of NHPI communities.

Diabetes has devastating effects on communities. Diabetes can affect an individual by causing blindness, amputation, and other physical roadblocks. However, diabetes doesn't only affect the individual: it affects the family. Dofi Faasou mentions how most of her family has diabetes and has gone blind, been amputated, or been put on dialysis. She sorrowfully talks about her brother and how he "got his leg amputated, not once, but [...] three times." She wishes that "someone had educated us more and raised an awareness when we were younger" because now, NHPI communities have to endure this pain. Although Faasou's account is from 2008, her story remains relevant today. Many NHPI communities and families live this lifestyle that Faasou sees as devastating. The effects of diabetes only worsen with time, and with the lack of intervention since Faasou's account, stories like hers show the reality of NHPI communities' hardships. Faasou's story is just one account of many that show us that NHPI individuals suffer from diabetes' devastating effects, and with them, their families suffer too.

Obesity within the NHPI community is a complex issue from various factors. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, limited access to healthy food options, and a lack of opportunities for physical activity can all play a role in the high rates of obesity within NHPI communities. Consequently, Pacific Islanders have witnessed a significant

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increase in obesity rates. Addressing this issue will require a comprehensive approach that tackles cultural norms, dietary habits, and access to healthy food options and physical activity opportunities. Education and awareness campaigns, community-based programs, and policy changes can all contribute to reducing obesity and diabetes rates among Pacific Islanders.

References

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https://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Health_Statistics/NCHS/NHIS/SHS/2018_SHS_Table_A-4.pdf https://www.medicinenet.com/is_diabetes_inherited_from_mother_or_father/article.htm <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6176268/> <https://tools.cdc.gov/podcasts/media/pdf/RisingTidePI.pdf> <https://www.apiahf.org/focus/health-care-access/> <https://tools.cdc.gov/podcasts/media/pdf/RisingTidePI.pdf>

EVENTS THIS WEEK

Speaker Tapa Viana from UTOPIA:
MAPA MAIA CLINIC - BUILDING SPACE FOR
COMMUNITY TO ACCESS QUALITY HEALTHCARE THAT IS
AFFIRMING OF ALL FACETS OF THEIR IDENTITY
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Wednesday
12:00PM

Brave Space Discussions: continuation of speaker's themes

Thursdays
12:00PM

Prize from Emails
Announced every Friday

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